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DAYS [illegible]

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THE

DAYS OF BRUCE;

A Story

FROM

SCOTTISH HISTORY.

BY

GRACE AGUILAR,

AUTHOR OF "HOME INFLUENCE," "THE MOTHER'S RECOMPENSE," "WOMAN'S FRIENDSHIP," "THE VALE OF CEDARS," ETC. ETC.

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THE DAYS OF BRUCE.

CHAPTER I.

Changed indeed was the aspect of Scotland and the fortunes of her king, in the autumn of 1311, from what we last beheld them, at the close of 1306. Then heavier and blacker had the wings of the tempest enshrouded them; night—the awful night of slavery, persecution, and tyranny—had closed around them, without one star in her ebon mantle, one little ray to penetrate the thick mists, and breathe of brighter things. But now hope, hand in hand with liberty, stood on the broad fields and fertile glens of Scotland; her wings unloosed and bright; her aspect full of smiles, of love; her voice thrilling to every Scotsman's heart, and nerving him with yet stronger energy, even when freedom was attained. One by one had stars of resplendent lustre shone through the misty veil of night; one by one had mists and clouds rolled up and fled, and the pure and spangled heavens looked down upon the free. The day-star was lit, the sun of glory had arisen, and Robert Bruce, in the autumn of 1311, was king in something more than name!

Yet not without the most persevering toil, the most unexampled patience, the most determined resolution, foresight, and self-control, not without a self-government of temper, passion, spirit, which man has seldom equalled, and most certainly never surpassed, had these things been accomplished. Destined in the end to be the savior of his country, it did indeed seem as if that same Almighty power who so destined him, who turned even his one evil deed to good, had manifested His judgment and His power to him, as to His servants of olden time. Fearfully was that involuntary crime chastised, ere power and glory, even freedom was vouchsafed. His own suf-

ferings, exile, persecution, defeat, the constant danger of his life, would have been in themselves sufficient evidence of an all-seeing Judge; but in the death, the cruel death of too many of his noble friends, men whose fidelity and worth had twined them round his very heart-strings, whose loss was fraught with infinitely deeper anguish than his own individual woes, we may trace still clearer the hand of vengeance, tempered still with long-suffering, yet unending mercy.

From the time of his landing in Scotland, called there as his contemporaries declare by a supernatural signal from Turnberry Head, the success of the Bruce certainly may be said to commence; though it was not till the death of their powerful enemy, Edward of England, in July, 1307, that the Scottish people permitted themselves to hope and feel their chains were falling, and they might yet be free.

Accustomed to elude the enemy by dispersing his men into small parties, the Bruce had repeatedly conquered much greater numbers than his own, and spread universal alarm amidst the English, by the suddenness and extraordinary skill of his military movements; that these dispersions repeatedly perilled his own life King Robert never heeded. His own courage and foresight and the unwavering fidelity of his followers so frequently interposed between himself and treachery, that at length danger itself became little more than excitement and adventure. The victory of Loudun Hill amply revenged on Pembroke the defeat at Methven, compelling both him and the Earl of Gloucester to retreat to Ayrshire; and from the splendor which accrued from it on the arms of the Bruce, obtained him the yet more desirable advantage of strong reinforcements of men, arms, and treasure, and enabled him to pursue his success, by driving the English back almost to the borders of their own land. Skirmish after skirmish, battle after battle followed, carried on with such surpassing skill and courage by the Bruce, that his call to battle was at length hailed by his men as a summons to victory. Finished in all the exercises of chivalry in the court of Edward, in the wisdom, prudence, and tactics of a general, Robert Bruce had *bought* his experience, and was in consequence yet more fitted for the important post he filled, at the same time that his dazzling, chivalric qualities gained him at once the admiration and confidence of his people.

Although perchance it was not till the momentous words

"Edward is dead" rang through Scotland with clarion tongue, and thrilled to the hearts of her sons, that even the most lukewarm started from their sluggish sleep, girded their swords to their sides, and hastened to join their rightful king, and yet more hope and courage and enthusiasm fired the breasts of her already devoted patriots, yet enough had been already accomplished by the Bruce to fill the last moments of the dying king with the bitterest emotions of disappointed ambition, hatred, and revenge.

From Burgh-upon-Sands, where his strength had so drooped he could not proceed further, despite his fixed resolve to hurl fire and sword on the only land which had dared his power—where the sovereign of England lay awaiting his last hour—the hills of Scotland were visible, and he felt that land was free! that the toil, the waste, the dreams of twenty years were vain; the vision of haughty ambition, of grasping power, had fled forever. Death was on his heart, and Scotland was unconquered, and would be glorious yet. He felt, he knew this; for in this hour of waning power, of fading life, fell the chains of Scotland. His instructions to his son, partaking as they do infinitely less of a civilized and enlightened monarch (for such was Edward, ere ambition crept into his soul) than of the barbarous customs of a savage chief, have betrayed to posterity that such were his feelings. The imbecile, uncertain character of the prince was too well known for his father to place any reliance upon him, even if his last commands were obeyed, and one little month after his death sufficed to prove both to English and Scotch that the prognostics of each were verified.

Sir John de Bretagne, Earl of Richmond, and the Earl of Pembroke were alternately named guardians of Scotland by the fickle Edward, who, satisfying his conscience with that measure, hastened back to London, there to enjoy in luxurious peace the society of Gaveston and other favorites, bearing with him the dead body of his father, whose last commands he thought fit, perhaps with some degree of wisdom, to disobey.

King Robert, however, perceiving that the Scottish guardians were collecting a much larger army than would permit him to stand the brunt of battle, thought it wiser to lure them to the northern districts of Scotland, where their forces could not be so easily increased, and where their total ignorance of the ground would ably assist his measures against them. James

of Douglas he left in Ettrick, to continue the struggle there, and nobly did that gallant soldier execute his trust. It was during this war in the north that the illness of the king, the insult of his foes, and the harrying of Buchan took place, as described by old Murdoch in the previous chapter. The citadels of Aberdeen, Forfar, and others of equal strength and importance, surrendered and were dismantled; and perceiving the most brilliant success had crowned his efforts in the north, he divided his forces, dispatching them under able leaders in various directions, thus to separate the English invaders, and prevent their compelling him to give them battle in a body, as at Falkirk, and deciding the fate of Scotland at a blow.

Douglas, Tweedale, and Ettrick were conquered by Lord James; and Galloway, despite the furious defence of its native chiefs and English allies, aided by the savage nature of its country, was finally brought into subjection by Edward Bruce, to whose wild and reckless spirit this daring warfare had been peculiarly congenial. On every side success had crowned the Bruce, and then it was he projected and carried into effect his long-desired vengeance on the Lords of Lorn, whose persecuting enmity demanded such return. Their defeat was total, despite their advantageous situation in the formidable pass of Cruachan Ben, where that great mountain sinks down to the banks of Loch Awe, a road full of precipices on one side, and a deep lake on the other. The Bruce, following his usual admirable plan of tactics, sent Douglas with some light troops to surround the mountain and turn the pass, himself covering the movement by a threatened assault in front, and thus attacked in rear, flank, and van at once, all advantage of ground was lost, and the Lords of Lorn, both father and son, compelled to escape by sea, leaving the greater part of their clan dead upon the field.

The vacillating measures of the second Edward in vain endeavored to remedy these evils; the barons of England, already disgusted at his unjust preference of upstart minions, either obeyed the royal commands for fresh musters of forces or neglected them, according to individual pleasure. Their own interests kept them in England; for, mistrusting their king and hating his favorites, they imagined their absence would but increase the power of the latter, and effectually remove the former from their control. Scotland was now a secondary object

with almost all the English nobles; their own prerogatives, their own private interests were at stake.

Meanwhile, the measures of that now liberated land proceeded with a steadiness, a wisdom, presenting a forcible contrast to those of her former captors. For the first time for many troubled years the estates of the kingdom assembled, and by a large and powerful body of representatives declared, in all proper and solemn form, that Edward's previous award of the crown to John Baliol was illegal, unjust, and void; that the late deceased Lord of Annandale was the only heir to the crown, and, in consequence, his grandson, Robert the Bruce, alone could be recognized as king; and all who dared dispute or deny this right were denounced, and would henceforward be prosecuted as traitors and abettors of treason; and not alone by the laity were these important matters acknowledged and proclaimed, the clergy of the kingdom, braving the bull of excommunication once promulgated against him, issued a solemn charge to their spiritual flocks, desiring them to recognize the Bruce as their sovereign.

Roused at length into action, Edward assembled a formidable army at Berwick, and entered Scotland, but too late in the season to effect any movement of consequence. Bruce, as usual, avoiding any decisive action, harassed their march, cut off their provisions, desolated the country, so that it could present nothing but waste and barren deserts to its invaders, and finally caused Edward to retreat to England out of all patience, and eager to solace himself with his queen and his favorites at Carlisle. A second, third, and fourth expedition were planned and dispatched against Scotland, but all equally in vain; the last headed by Gaveston, who, despite his foppery and presumption, had all the qualities of a brave knight and skilful general, advanced as far as the Frith of Forth, finding, however, neither man, woman, nor child, cattle nor provender—all as usual was desolate. The villagers, emulating the courage and forbearance of their sovereign, retreated without a murmur to the Highlands, carrying with them all of their property that permitted removal, although the extreme severity of the season, and the various inconveniences resulting from a residence of some length amid morasses and precipices, rendered this test of their patriotism more than ordinarily severe.

In was in retaliation for these invasions King Robert planned

and executed that expedition against England, from which Sir Amiot and his men were leisurely returning at the commencement of this chapter. He waited but to see his own land cleared of her invaders, and then like a mountain torrent poured down his fury on the English frontier. It appeared as if Gaveston had scarce returned to his master, with the assurance that the Scottish king was too far north for any new disturbance at present, when the news of his appearance on the very threshold of England burst on the astounded king. It was vain to think of resisting him. For fifteen days the Bruce remained in England, paying in kind the injuries so unjustly inflicted upon himself; and on returning found the little loss he had sustained amply compensated by the increase of animation and glee in his troops, and yet more substantially by the treasure and money amassed, for the northern counties had found it necessary to purchase his forbearance; and Robert rejoiced that it was so, simply that it enabled him in a measure to repay his devoted subjects for the loyalty they had ever manifested towards his person, and the aid they had hastened to bestow in the liberation of their land.

With regard to the other characters of our tale, so little change had taken place in their fates since we last beheld them, and that change will so easily be traced in the succeeding pages, that there is little need to linger upon them.

There was still a shade of sadness tinging the royal scutcheon of the Bruce. His wife, his child, his sisters, and other near and dear relatives and friends, were still in the power of Edward, and from the desultory warfare, to which the interests of his country compelled him to adhere, there seemed as yet but little chance of his effecting their liberation. Ransom so high as Edward would demand (if indeed he would accept it at all) the Bruce could not pay, without anew impoverishing his kingdom, and laying heavy taxes on a people ever ready to sacrifice their all for him, and this his character was far too exalted and unselfish even to think upon. The only means of obtaining their freedom was an exchange of prisoners, and this was ineffectual. He defeated, harassed, and compelled the English to evacuate Scotland, but, from his avoidance of general engagements, he had taken no prisoners whose rank and consequence would weigh against the detention of his relatives; and there was one amid those captives whom, from most un-

justifiable severity and degradation of a cruel public confinement, the Bruce and his noble followers burned to release. But the citadel of Berwick, where they believed the Countess of Buchan still to be immured—for the cage was still apparent—by its immense strength, numerous garrison, and closely fortified town, was as yet an object of desire indeed, but one not possible to be attained, and from that very feeling the Bruce had rather avoided it in his invasion of England.

The Earl of Buchan, it was rumored and believed, had died in England, and was imagined to have left his title and estates to his son, who, soon after the death of Edward I., had been heard of in Scotland as having become a devoted adherent to the court, and more particularly to the person, of King Edward, who lavished on him so many favors, that it was supposed his former boyish folly in adhering to the Bruce and Scotland was entirely forgotten. Rumor said he had often been heard bitterly to regret the past, and had solemnly sworn fidelity to England. In what manner this rumor was regarded by King Robert and his patriots our tale will show, as also the fate of Agnes.

The Earl of Fife, loving better the rich costume, merry idlesse, and sumptuous fare of a courtier, than the heavy armor, fatiguing duties, and hasty meals of a knight, thought it wiser to forswear his dislike to King Robert, the pursuance of it involving a vast deal of fatigue and danger, and consequently remained a neutral in King Edward's court, keeping aloof from all the quarrels of Gaveston and the barons, and too much wrapt in his own luxurious selfishness to be heeded by either party.

Gloucester and his noble wife belong to history, and consequently not at present to us. We shall meet the latter again in a future page.

Amid all his wanderings and various fortunes, two of the gentler sex, his own near relatives, had remained constant to the Bruce. Now, indeed, their train and attendants were much increased; but there had been times when the Lady Campbell and her daughter Isoline had been alone of their sex beside their king. It will be remembered that, when that painful parting took place between the patriot warriors and those devoted females who had attended them so long, Sir Niel Campbell, the better to appeal to the chivalric feelings of the

Lord of the Isles, had consented to his wife's earnest solicitation to accompany him; and also that, despite all his and King Robert's entreaty to the contrary, she had insisted on herself and Isoline sharing their hardships in the retreat of Rathlin, instead of accepting the eagerly proffered hospitality of the island chief. They were, indeed, as ministering spirits in that dreary retreat, ever ready to tend, soothe, cheer, to give bright example of patient fortitude, when that of the sterner sex seemed failing; they either suffered not more than their companions, or refused to own or show that they did, for Isoline, although at first a mere child in years, gave good evidence that all the noble and endearing qualities of her mother's line were hers; and when the fate of the queen and her attendants was made known, how earnestly did not only Sir Niel but good King Robert himself rejoice that two at least of those near and dear relatives were spared them, and as earnestly wish they had never parted from the rest!

Fatiguing and precarious as their life was in the Bruce's train, compelled at a moment's warning to march from a brief resting-place, often even to adopt other guise than their own, still these devoted females were ever found beside their king, and if Lady Campbell had ever felt anxiety as to the effect these wanderings would have upon the health and beauty of her child, they were, at the time we resume our tale, entirely removed; for Isoline Campbell at nineteen might have borne the palm alike of beauty, truth, and dignity, from those born and bred in a peaceful court, and shielded with the tenderest care from aught like outward tempest or inward storm. To most of the youthful knights in her uncle's camp, it had been only the last two years that she had burst upon them as some beautiful spirit, whose existence they could scarce trace to the merry mountain child they had first known, and to whom they had in sport taught the use of many a chivalric weapon. No arrow was more true to its mark than Isoline's; but latterly, that the state of her uncle's court permitted her the privileges due to her sex and rank, security and rest, and perhaps, too, that she was conscious girlhood was fast merging into a higher state of being, demanding more reserve, and quietness, and dignity, certain it was these sports were laid aside, and her former companions bowed before her beauty and owned its spell, as to one they had only lately known. One indeed saw but the per-

fecting of charms he had long admired; yet few suspected the Lord James of Douglas, whose every thought and speech seemed of war and freedom, had time for dreams of love, and that her image had dwelt next his heart, even when her preceptor in all chivalric sports, her guardian in their hasty marches, the gallant knight who was ever the first to find some suitable halting-place, collect fresh heath for her couch, some dainty of fish or fowl to woo her to the rustic board, services she had ever met with a joyous jest or thrilling laugh, or some deed of merry mischief. Within the last two years her manner to him too had changed; but it differed not an atom from that with which she ever treated all the other knights, and Douglas could not, therefore, as he wished, and at first hoped, argue favorably for himself.

Of one other personage, as a character totally unknown to our former pages, we must say a few words, and then, craving pardon for this long digression, proceed to more active scenes.

It was in the pass of Ben Cruachan, in the fierce struggle between himself and the men of Lorn, King Robert became aware of the presence of a stranger knight, who, remaining close as a shadow by his side during the whole of the action, had fought with a skill, courage, and almost desperation, that at once riveted upon him the attention of the king, ever alive to aught of gallantry or chivalry in his leaders—an attention heightened by the fact, that twice or thrice the knight's great prowess and agility had saved his own person from imminent danger. He appeared on the watch to avert and defeat every attempt to surround and crush the king; thrusting himself in the very midst of couched spears and pointed swords, and thus, by the imminent risk of his own life or liberty, covering the king when too hard pressed upon, and enabling him to regain his footing, and press with renewed power on the foe. Much marvel, indeed, his appearance occasioned, even in the heat and rush of battle, for his armor, the bearings of his shield, nay, his very mode of fighting, distinguished him as a stranger.

Eagerly the monarch looked to the close of that triumphant day, to bring this new recruit before him, almost fearing he would vanish as suddenly and mysteriously as he had appeared, but he was not disappointed. That same evening, as he stood on a ledge of rock about an acre square, surrounded by his gallant leaders, and in sight of all his men, who were rejoicing in

their great and decisive triumph, the feud between the houses of Bruce and Comyn, perhaps, adding more zest to their feelings, the stranger knight approached, and kneeling before the king, besought his acceptance of his services as a soldier, his homage as a subject, and solemnly swearing fidelity to his person and his cause in both these characters. There was a peculiar and most thrilling mournfulness in his voice, seeming almost indefinably to denote him a younger man than he had previously appeared, and the solemn earnestness of his entreaty appeared to express a more than common interest in the Bruce's reply. His services were as frankly accepted as they had been tendered, and warmly the king admired, praised, and acknowledged how much he had been indebted to the extraordinary gallantry shown in the previous engagement, adding, with a smile, that he hoped the knight intended to satisfy the curiosity that brave conduct had engendered, and remember it was not customary to tender the homage of a subject with the helmet on and vizor down. With the same melancholy earnestness of expression which had marked his previous address, the stranger replied he was aware of this, and therefore was it that he knelt before the Bruce more as a suppliant, than proffering to him that which was his right; his helmet he could indeed remove, but he was under a solemn vow never to reveal his features, birth, or rank, till, either by his aid, or through his personal agency, a deed had been accomplished, and freedom given to one of high and noble birth, unjustly and cruelly detained a prisoner by Edward, King of England.

"Nay, for that we may go hand in hand with you, young sir," answered the king; "there is many a noble prisoner in the realm of England we would fain see released, but ere that may be accomplished, I fear me some years must pass. Thine was a rash vow; did ye deem its penance but of short duration? I could have wished it otherwise, for in our small, well-known, and well-tried train mystery were better shunned."

"My liege," replied the young man, with an earnestness almost startling, "I thought not, reckoned not of the lapse of time in the adherence to this vow; till its work be accomplished, till the freedom of one removes all mystery from me, there is neither rest, nor joy, nor glory, for the heart now speaking to your grace. What boots it, then, to think of time? My honor and my life are wrapt up in the prisoner whose liberty I seek,

and till that be accomplished, there is no privation, no penance in the adherence to my vow. I have no name, no follower, naught but mine own good sword and stainless truth, and the memory of knighthood from a hand, bold, noble, glorious, as your grace's own. I ask but permission to follow thee, to serve my country and my king; even in the performance of my vow, in serving thee alone, may I hope for its accomplishment, and in its accomplishment I shall do good service to thy cause."

"But if so much depends upon another, and that other a prisoner in the power of Edward, tell me, young sir, for we may scarce reckon with certainty on human life, how will it be with thee an the prisoner on whom so much depends live not to be released by man?"

"Then I, too, may die unknown, for there will be none to mourn me," burst from the knight's lips, in tones of such passionate agony, it thrilled to the rudest spirit present, and King Robert instantly raised him from the ground, bending, as he did so, to conceal the deep sympathy he felt was stamped upon his brow.

"Nay, nay," he said, with extreme kindness, "I meant not to call forth such emotion by a suggestion that, after all, perhaps, there needed not. We accept the services so nobly tendered; we give thee full liberty to adhere to thy solemn vow and for thy truth and honor we will ourselves be answerable."

Vows similar to that of the stranger, nay, often made for causes much more trivial, were too much in the spirit of chivalry to occasion any drawback in his favor. Already prepossessed by his gallant bearing, his apparent perfection in all knightly exercises, and, perhaps, still more from the tone of touching sadness which pervaded his manner and address, the warriors crowded round, and lavished on him cordiality and kindness.

From that day Sir Amiot de la Branche, for so he became universally denominated from the bearings on his shield, had been among the first amidst the Bruce's leaders remarkable for bravery, untiring fortitude, and most unwearying activity. At first, at his own request, he simply fought as a knight and soldier in the king's own private guard, but gradually his great services and excellent counsel raised him higher and higher in the estimation of all, more particularly in that of the Bruce, whose talent for discovering the characters of his knights, and so guiding their various services as always to assign them that

which was most congenial, was something remarkable, and at length he became, at the king's own especial request, leader of a gallant troop of picked men, many of whom had themselves requested permission to follow his banner, and in consequence, the fifty named by the king speedily swelled to double that number.

Three years had now passed since his first appearance, and still his vow was inviolably kept, for, as we have already noticed, despite the increasing glory and greatness of the Bruce, the Scottish prisoners still remained in custody in England. Within the last year, indeed, he was seen more often mingling with other knights around the Lady Isoline, but even then there was no evidence of a relaxation in his sadness; nay, could the thought of his private hours have been read, men would have seen contending emotions struggling at his heart, both equally intense, and that, perchance, the fulfilment of his vow was not now his *only* impulse—the sole end and being of his life indeed it still was, but perchance it comprised yet more than the liberation of another.

It was strange that in these three years aught concerning this important prisoner had never been discovered, nor made much subject of discussion. Some imagined a near relative, perhaps a father, who had not always been faithful to the Bruce's interests, and consequently the son wished to earn himself a name ere his own was divulged. But by far the greater number settled in their own minds that it was a lady love he had bound himself to release; and this idea obtained so much dominion, that almost all the court and camp of Bruce found themselves believing it, as steadily as if the knight had himself confirmed it, and thus removing the *mystery*, all curiosity departed also. Sir Amiot might have heard these rumors, but he gave them little heed, and by his silence encouraged all the vagaries of fancy in which his companions chose to indulge. He went on his way in public, reserved, sad, cold, nay, almost stern; in private, well-nigh crushed beneath the struggle of the spirit and bitterness of soul, all, all the wretchedness combined in that one word—*alone*.

CHAPTER II.

It was a gay and brilliant scene which the royal pavilion presented a few nights after King Robert, his various leaders and their respective troops, had met and united, amidst the luxuriant meadows, glens, and hills of Perthshire. About ten miles southwest of the city of Perth, which was to be the next object of attack, the tents were pitched, and wood, rock, and water combined to render the site as picturesque as can well be imagined.

The king's pavilion, which was now adorned with all that could mark and add dignity to his royal rank, was erected in a sort of hollow, formed by overhanging cliffs, and environed by thick trees. It was usually divided into two compartments, outer and inner, and lined with brocade of Scotland's national blue, bordered with a broad fringe of silver. A thick curtain, and narrow passage formed by the rock, separated the royal tent from that of the Lady Campbell and her train, which was furnished with many a luxury that the English fugitives, in their various expeditions, had left behind them, and formed a strange contrast to the miserable huts and caves which, but a very few years previous, had formed their homes. Undeterred by the unhappy fate of those noble females originally in King Robert's train, the wives and daughters of those noble men who had gradually thronged anew round the banner of the Bruce hastened to pay their homage, and swell the train of the Lady Campbell, as soon as the reviving fortunes of the king permitted such increase. Now some fifteen or twenty noble maidens and matrons, exclusive of their humbler attendants, were assembled, and by the beauty of the former, the dignity and mild demeanor of the latter, added a grace and polish to King Robert's mountain court which without them, perchance, had scarce been found.

The night of which we speak, the two compartments of the royal tent had been thrown into one, and consequently offered space enough for the chivalry and beauty which the king's command had there assembled; the floor was inlaid with squares of moss, from the darkest to the lightest green, the palest pink to the deepest crimson, giving the appearance of

rich mosaic, and offering a soft delicious resting to the fairy feet which pressed it; garlands of oak, interspersed with flowers of the heath, and supporting gay banners and pennons, many of which had been taken from the foe, hung from the brocaded walls, whose stars of silver glimmered brightly and sparkling in the light of innumerable lamps which illumined the tent with radiance equal to the day. The broad banner of Scotland marked the upper end of the pavilion, where a dais was erected, seemingly for the king and his immediate family, although it was little needed, for they mingled indiscriminately with their guests. Many a knight had doffed his heavy harness, and though they laughingly declared they had well-nigh forgotten how to assume a garb of peace fitted for courtly festivity, yet they contrived to give themselves an appearance of gay and splendid costume, that might have vied with the more luxurious courtiers of England; velvets and satins slashed with gold and silver mingled gayly with the shining steel of the half armor which many were compelled to retain, from lack of other clothing. There was good King Robert, somewhat more aged in feature than we last beheld him, though but little more than five years had passed, the lines of his countenance were deeper and more strongly marked; his cheek was paler, the brow and eye more thoughtful, and here and there a silver thread peeped through the rich brown masses of his hair; there was Lord Edward Bruce, the only one of his brave brothers left him out of four; and there were Randolph, Fitzalan, the Frasers, and Lennox, forgetting his age to enjoy to the full the scene before him; Hay, and others of equal note, and Douglas, despite his swarthy complexion and irregular features, possessing such winning courtesy, such chivalric ease and grace of mien, as universally to bear away the palm of gallantry in such a scene, even as on a field of war; and 'mid these manly forms glided, like spirits of light and air, the graceful figures of the gentler sex, with soft cheeks blushing beneath the consciousness of their own beauty, eyes veiled 'neath their long lashes, and stealing but timid glances, up to those with whom they traced the mazy dance, or loitered listening to tales of knightly lore.

"Wherefore join ye not the dance, my Lord of Douglas?" demanded the Lady Isoline, to whom the king had in jest abdicated his seat of state upon the dais, and who of a truth filled it as if she had been born and bred a queen. Many a

youthful cavalier had gathered round her, seeking her smile, yet Douglas was now there almost alone. "Wherefore join ye not the dance?" she said; "I have seen the *devoir* of a son of chivalry most perfectly performed in all save this. Let not these gay hours pass unenjoyed."

"Nay, they are but too happily detained," he answered; "gentle lady, they were indeed joyless passed other than by thy side."

"Nay, my good lord, in yon fair crowd methinks there are many would give dearer reward for your chivalric homage than ever can Isoline."

"Dearer reward—that, lady, cannot be," replied the knight, in a lower tone, and refusing to discover any meaning in her words farther than the hour's *badinage*. "Knowest thou not the smile that's hardly won is far more precious than that willingly bestowed?"

"A woman's mood, my lord, is a most weary study; and be assured, the walls of thine own fortress are more easily won than a smile withheld. Ah, by the way, there was some tale of that redoubted castle, which, like the phœnix, is ever rising from the ashes in which your prowess hurls it. I would fain hear from your own lips, for I believe not all they tell me; it was unlike my Lord of Douglas."

"What do they tell?" demanded the knight, with something like fierce impatience. "What dare they tell *thee* false of me?"

"Nay, an thou speakest thus, I've done, for of a truth my news brook not such outbreaks."

"I pray thee, then, be merciful, most noble lady," answered Douglas, his fiery spirit controlled on the instant beneath her glance.

"I have been merciful already, as thou shalt hear. It was Sir John Wilton, from whom thy valor last won thy hereditary castle, was it not?" Douglas bowed, "and it was for the love of a lady he engaged to hold that terrible fortress a year and a day?"

"Even so, gentle lady."

"And it was rumored you knew this, and yet he fell under your hand?"

"And they lied in their teeth who said so!" again fiercely began Douglas.

"Now peace, fiery spirit; I tell thee they rumored this, but I do not tell thee I believed it."

"You did me but justice, lady, and I thank thee," replied Douglas, with feeling.

"Nay, I should have done a kind friend and noble master in all knightly deeds foul wrong had I thought other," said Isoline, with something less of piquancy than she had yet deigned to speak. "I heeded the rumor no more than the breeze which passed me by, nay, I vowed that it was false, for I knew the Douglas better. Now, then, in return for such consideration, tell me how in truth it chanced."

"I would the tale were more worth your kindly hearing," said Douglas, and he spoke with animation, for in the delight of hearing this insinuated praise, he forgot the lady's first pointed words. "It does but tell a deed often told before. I have sworn the home of my fathers should never rest in English hands, while I bear a sword to win it. I heard that again the insulting foe, despite of the ruin which surrounded it, the danger they well knew that threatened, had dared to build anew the walls, to fortify and put in train for a strong defence: I had heard this, and swore they should rue it, though it so chanced, that being then actively employed in King Robert's service, some months elapsed before I could approach my native districts—"

"Thus rendering your task more perilous," interposed Isoline, "by giving the English sufficient time to fortify and reinforce. Would it not have been wiser to have sought his grace's leave to attack it on the instant?"

"Nay, that was not needed; the rescue of Castle Dangerous was my own business, that which detained me King Robert's, and, of course, of infinitely more importance. At length his grace, hearing how the districts of Teviot were again under terror of the English stationed in the castle, and knowing my vow, dismissed me unasked, with about eighty men, whom I dispersed in all directions, to obtain intelligence. The news we gained determined my using stratagem rather than a direct attack, for it was said Sir John Wilton—I then knew no more of him than his name—aware of the great peril of his charge, was more strongly and skilfully guarded than either of his predecessors, and was prepared against all covert attacks. His garrison, too, were double the number of my limited force;

therefore I deemed it no disgrace to my knighthood to endeavor to lure him to an open field. One of my men, well disguised, penetrated the castle, obtained the hearing of Sir John, and informed him that one of the most noted followers of the Bruce, for whose detention a large reward and much honor was offered by King Edward, lay at a little distance with but eighty men, offering a fair prize for Sir John, as it needed but part of his garrison wholly to subdue them and take their leader prisoner. The bait took; for Wilton was in truth a gallant soldier, and at first spoke of sallying from the castle with but the same number of men, that we might meet man to man, but my trusty follower believing that so few would be but playwork for his master, advised Wilton to take with him a hundred and twenty, or at least a hundred men."

"For which deed the Douglas no doubt was grateful, as it gave him increase of glory," interrupted the lady; "I never yet knew him content with an equal combat. I am glad I ventured to absolve you ere I knew your stratagem was no unknightly one."

"Save, lady, that Sir John, though truly informed as to numbers, came forth for our capture, believing us unprepared, whereas we met him in close, compact, and gallant array—the banner of Douglas and its lord at their head—ready, which at a moment's glance he must have perceived, to do battle, not unto death but for the castle. Could my vow have been performed, the fortress gained more openly, I had forsworn stratagem, even such as this."

"Nay, there was little in this, methinks, which the laws of chivalry could condemn, my lord," said Isoline, somewhat kindly. "Well, then, ye fought, and this English knight fell; and how was it ye knew the tale respecting him?"

"We did fight, lady, and gallantly, believe me, for Wilton, conscious too late of his own imprudence in being thus decoyed, fought like a lion to redeem his error, and to endeavor to make good a retreat into the fortress. Even as he fought, it struck me there was something more than common in his gallantry, eluding every attempt we made for his capture; he literally rushed on death, and found it. The field once our own, the castle speedily and almost without a summons opened its gates, and its remaining officers and men surrendered. On bearing the body of the young knight to the castle, and stripping it

of the armor, hoping there might be yet signs of life, a letter dropped from his vest, which had evidently rested on his heart, its contents dictated by a loving heart, trembling for the fate of him to whom it was addressed, while it yet animated him to persevere, as his gallant courage bound him yet closer to her, first aroused my attention, and I demanded of my prisoners what it meant. Sir Piers de Monthemar, who had remained almost in a stupor of grief over the body, started up at my question, and with fierce invectives gave me the tale I asked, and which you, lady, already know. It wanted but a brief month to the appointed time, and God wot, had but the faintest whisper of this engagement reached me, stern, ruthless, as they deem me, Douglas had left his father's halls in the hands of the Sassenach, rather than have done this. They knew me not who said I knew this, and yet slew him; perchance they deem the Douglas hath no heart, no sympathy with those that love."

"Nay, take not my idle words so much to heart, gallant knight," said Isoline, gayly, for true to her inward resolve to give her visibly devoted cavalier no encouragement, she dared not evince the feeling which the fate of the unfortunate Wilton excited; "I tell thee I held them as naught, and for these kindly disposed retailers of men's deeds, nay, of his thoughts too, why, perchance they deem the gallant Douglas far, far too wise to have aught in common with poor sorry fools that love."

"Nay, lady, I do beseech thee, speak not, think not thus," earnestly entreated the knight, in a lower tone; "fame, glory, chivalry itself, untouched by love, were like the world without its sun. Thou hast done thy poor knight justice in this deed; believe not, then, he scoffs at love."

"Pardon me, my lord, perchance I should deem him wiser did he hold it naught," answered the lady, more gravely; "believe a woman's word, 'tis all too vain and void and distant for a noble knight like thee. But hast thou no more of the unhappy Wilton to tell me?" she added, quickly changing her tone and subject; "thou didst digress ere thy tale was done. Didst hear aught of his lady love? Methinks, had she borne him real affection, she did unwisely to test his courage thus."

"Unwisely, perchance; yet surely he that could refuse such a test of love were undeserving of the offered prize. I

have often regretted that aught of the lady I could never learn."

"And what did your lordship with your prisoners—sympathizing as thou didst with Wilton, I should judge thou wert somewhat less than usually severe?"

"Forgot for once the interests of his country and king, aye, and his own," interposed King Robert, gayly, for it was always a satisfaction to him to perceive his favorite warrior and much-loved niece in amicable conversation, and he had approached them just in time to hear and answer Isoline more fully than Douglas would have done. "Gave them all freedom without ransom; sent them, with fair speeches and true knightly courtesy, back to their own land, without even demanding the condition that they would no more draw sword against Scotland. Did he not more courteously than wisely, my fair niece?"

"He did as King Robert would have done, my liege; and therefore did not courteously alone, but well and wisely, aye, and nobly," and either forgetting her resolve, or really from her approval of the deed, Isoline turned towards him, every feature beaming with such a full and heartfelt smile, that every pulse of the warrior throbbed, and he bowed his head in acknowledgment, without the power of uttering one word.

"Loves our fair niece her seat of state so well, that she is loath to quit it even for the dance?" said the king, smiling. "Is it not something strange to see Isoline so idle?"

"Nay, my liege, it was more befitting Isoline, as representative of majesty, to sit it queenly, and call her subjects round her to list their deeds, than mingle with them in the dance: that, good my lord, were all too great an honor. Thinks not your grace with me?"

"I were no knight could I think otherwise," replied the king, fondly laying his hand on the rich, dark chestnut hair whose only ornament was a natural wreath of the delicate blue-bell and mountain heath.

With a light and playful smile Isoline bent gracefully to her sovereign, who, with true knightly courtesy, had raised her small, white hand to his lips. The eye of the maiden at that instant rested on the figure of Sir Amiot of the Branch, who leaning against one of the supporting pillars of the tent, appeared intently observing her.

For the first time since he had joined the Bruce he had

thrown aside his armor, but the suit he wore, though of rich material, was as sombre as his more warlike habiliments. Doublet, hose, and the short, graceful mantle were of sable velvet, slashed with pale gray satin, while the latter was richly lined with sable fur; his collar was of the most exquisitely fine and whitest linen, but perfectly plain, giving no evidence that gentle hands had been employed in its embroidery, as was the custom in those days. A plain silver clasp secured it at his throat, and the only ornaments on his mantle were his armorial bearings, and their melancholy tale, "*Ni nom ni paren, je suis seul,*" worked in silver on the shoulder. He still wore the demi-mask, which permitted the exposure of mouth and chin, and round the former, as Isoline first caught his glance, a kind of half-sad, half-unconscious smile was playing. His hair, which seemed very thick and long, had been evidently arranged with the utmost care, and a quantity of glossy raven curls fell on either side, rather lower than his throat, behind, but in front only so as completely to shade his cheek.

"And what said these gallant knights?—told they your highness of their brave deeds in England?" inquired the king, with an affectation of homage to his fair niece, which sat well upon him.

"Truly, yes; they gave fair tidings, goodly proofs that Scottish knights are of true mettle still—for the Lord James of Douglas, methinks his name will become a terror to the English, even as that of the valiant Richard to the Saracens of yore. How is it you alone have failed in duty, youthful sir?" she added, suddenly addressing the cavalier of the mask, with a tone and manner of such peculiar sweetness that he well-nigh started. "Must I impeach you of unknightly disaffection, and deem you most disloyal?"

"Sir Amiot, what hast thou done?" rejoined Robert, laughing, though a slight and scarcely perceptible shade gathered for the moment on the brow of Douglas, who, though at times conversing with the knights and maidens who passed him, still stood by the side of Isoline, listening to her words as if they were too precious to be lost even when not addressed to himself.

"Unknightly disaffection, disloyalty! these are heavy charges, sir knight, and from a lady," continued the king. "Pray you, haste to answer them, for an thou art as faithful a subject to

the present occupant of this royal seat as gallant soldier to the Bruce, thou art all too valuable to be lightly lost."

"We ask you then, fair sir," said Isoline, cheerfully, following the king's words, "and in all charity, for we hold your knighthood in good favor, wherefore, when other gallant knights and noble gentlemen approached this throne to do us homage and report their knightly deeds, seeking reward we are willing to bestow, you alone, of this goodly company, have kept aloof, seemingly disdainful of our power? Call ye not this disloyal, and most unknightly disaffection?"

"Even so it seemeth, gracious madam," replied the knight, entering into the spirit of her words, and bending his knee with humility far more real than affected, though to those who stood around it seemed but the latter; "yet though I fear me I can make but weak defence, I do most utterly deny the charge. I knew not, lady, that the same honor, the same kindly courtesy awaited the nameless adventurer as these noble knights of stainless names and high distinguished race, else had I been amid the first to pay my homage and report my humble deeds; I knew not this, and kept aloof, though my will indeed had brought me here."

"Nay, an thou puttest so much of earnest in thy tone, sir knight, we must have done, extending the sceptre of mercy, though in truth not half convinced. Hath thy knighthood passed so unregarded by King Robert, we would yet ask, that thou dost still feel it needs a name?"

"Pardon me, lady, but to King Robert I am a soldier and a subject, whose truth and worth need proof, and scarce a name; thou, lady, a high and noble maiden, methought, perchance, had demanded more, and I came not, lest it seemed mine homage neared presumption more than duty."

"Truly, my gallant knight speaks well," said the king, nodding approvingly; "thou must forgive his seeming lack of homage, sweet Isoline, be it but for my sake."

"Nay, good my liege, willing as we would be to do thy will, Sir Amiot's defence absolves himself. Sir knight, thou art excused; we hold thee faithful subject, and would our favor possessed sufficient power to chase all sadness from thy heart."

"And now, sir, that ye have satisfied the Lady Isoline, be kind enough to satisfy me," began Douglas, half jest, half earnest, his secret feelings inclining perhaps far more to the lat-

ter than the former. "By what right, an you feared the Lady Isoline too much to do her homage, wear you those flowers?"

"By what right, my lord?" replied the young knight, glancing at a very small bunch of bluebells and heath which he wore; "by that right which Nature gives all her votaries. I sought her shrine, and plucked them; her grasp was not so firm as to deny my wish."

"And knowest thou not, an thou fearest so much the charge of presumption, the wearing them is a bold challenge to all knights and gentles, proclaiming the Lady Isoline's favor is all thine own?"

"What, for proving his taste in Nature's jewels is as undeniable as mine own? Now, shame on thee, Douglas, for the charge!" interposed the lady, gayly. "Thou art over-careful of our favor, sir; yet an thou deemest yon lonely cavalier too highly honored, even by the permission to wear his own culled flowers, there are buds enow, for all who choose to take them and dub themselves my knights."

She removed the rich wreath from her beautiful hair as she spoke, and unloosing its lightly twined stalks, replaced a few in a gracefully falling bunch on one side of her head, and threw the remainder a few paces from her, smiling with an expression of the most mischievous archness, as the young knights, Lord Douglas amongst the first, eagerly darted forward to possess themselves of the coveted prize. For one moment, however, her smile betrayed a deeper feeling, for she saw Sir Amiot quickly and silently, as if fearful of observation, bend down to raise a tiny sprig of purple heath, which had fallen close at his feet, and hide it in his vest. Whether the perceiving this action occasioned this deeper smile we know not, and Isoline herself, determined there should be no cessation in her merry raillery, again addressed the masked knight.

"Tell me, Sir Amiot, how fared ye in the late expedition? our royal uncle reports marvels of your prowess, and for ourself," her voice, though her words were still jest, thrilled in its sweetness on her listener's heart, "we would know if thy vow be any the nearer its completion. Hast heard aught, discovered aught of the prisoner you seek?"

"Alas! no, lady; I scarce had dared to hope it, yet when again on Scottish ground my heart sunk lower, as if hope had been there, although I knew it not. I must still strive, still

struggle, aye, and hope, despite her falsity, that even if my sword fail in the actual deed of liberation, yet when the King of Scotland may demand at Edward's hands the restoration of every Scottish prisoner by him detained in exile, his lip, King Robert's lip, may free me of my vow. Merciful heaven! who, what is that—wherefore looks she thus—how came she here?" he exclaimed, extreme and startling agitation both of voice and manner suddenly usurping the place of his former sad, collected tones, and he hurried question after question, as if terrified at the sound of his own voice. Alarmed and astonished, Isoline hastily turned in the direction of his hand, and though the object on which he gazed was no strange one to her, that it could cause him such extraordinary emotion not a little increased the mystery around him.

It was the figure of a female, seemingly, from the aerial lightness of the peculiarly delicate and tiny form, the exquisite beauty of every feature, which were all cast in the same minute mould, the wild mirth which at that instant was visible round her lip and in her eye, one in the very first stage of life, whose only dream was joy. But this was but the fancy of the first glance; the next, and the heart sunk back appalled, for there was a light in those deep blue eyes, a continual changing of expression, from the height of glee to the darkest depths of misery, round the beautiful mouth, an absence of all glow on the softly rounded cheek, which seemed to whisper that the mind that lovely shell contained was gone, and yet there was a something round her, even as it proclaimed the loss of mind, that it had existed, it was a *wreck* and not a *void* on which they gazed—and yet, how could this be? so young, so beautiful she seemed How could she have known, encountered misery sufficient for this fatal ill? What could have wrecked the mind, if indeed there had been a time when its light illumined its beauteous dwelling—oh, who might answer?

She had come within that gorgeous tent unseen, at first unheard, and when that low, musical laugh of momentary glee betrayed her, the gay crowd paused and turned to look upon her, with spirits chilled in their mirth; sympathy, reverence, aye, something near akin to awe, the rudest amongst them ever felt, when, like a spirit of another sphere, she stood amongst them, for they knew the storm which had caused that wreck; the bolt which had fallen on that brain and heart, and buried

all of mind and life beneath its desolation. As Isoline, attracted by Sir Amiot's emotion, met the glance of the afflicted girl, who stood with her long, wavy hair gleaming as pale gold, falling well-nigh to her knees, forming a natural mantle around the pale blue robe she wore, after the first moment of astonishment, remembering it had so chanced that Sir Amiot had certainly never beheld, and perhaps never been aware of the existence of such a being before, she accounted for his agitation by the effect that her sudden presence generally produced, an effect likely to be more startling to a mind sensitive, nay, almost morbid, as she believed Sir Amiot's, than even upon others. But all expression of mirth passed from the Lady Isoline's features as she beheld her, when again she turned to answer the knight; there was a sadness, a depth and capability of feeling in her large, dark eyes, which a minute before had seemed well-nigh incompatible with their sparkling mirth.

"It is Agnes, the only daughter, perhaps now I should say the only child of the Countess of Buchan, and the unfortunate bride, and, alas! widow of my noble, my murdered kinsman, Nigel. Hast thou not heard her tale? perchance not, for the memory of that which has made her thus is fraught with such agony to the king, men seldom speak it but in whispers. Alas! its terrible truth would never pass from his mind, even if that lovely being did not so continually and so fearfully recall it."

"Made her thus!—what mean you?" answered the knight, still painfully agitated.

"Canst thou not see? yet perchance no; to a stranger's eyes that loveliness seems too perfect for the total wreck of mind."

"God in heaven! mean you the mind—the beautiful, the gifted mind, the loving heart, the gentle spirit?" He checked himself abruptly, for Isoline's glance rested on him in utter bewilderment, and added, in tones struggling for calmness, "Mean you the mind has gone?"

"Alas! 'tis even so."

The knight struggled, but in vain, to suppress a smothered groan.

"How—wherefore—why have I not seen her, known it before?" fell in stifled and disjointed sentences from his lips.

"'Tis a tale of sorrow," replied Isoline; "and yet I marvel thou hast not heard it."

"I knew only she was engaged to the youngest brother of

the Bruce, the noble Nigel, whom in former years I knew and loved, and would have died to save; but thou sayest the bride, the widow—were they married?"

"Yes, the Abbot of Scone united them—at the altar's foot their vows were pledged; the whole ceremony completed, when that fearful conflagration took place by which the castle of Kildrummie was won by the English, and of which you must have heard."

"Ignited by treachery within the fortress, was it not?" demanded Sir Amiot, compelling himself to speak, that he might conceal the emotion with which he listened to the tale.

"It was. Sir Nigel rushed from the side of Agnes to struggle even unto death. From nightfall to noon the following day the desperate strife continued, with little intermission. He was taken prisoner by an accident causing his foot to slip, the particulars of which you may hear elsewhere, and he never saw his Agnes again till just before the Earl of Hereford set off on his march to England, when she rejoined him in the disguise of a page; a disguise, it appears, so complete, that at the first moment even Nigel did not know her."

"And she stayed with him, followed him. Heroic, devoted being! how little did we dream thou couldst have done this—but pardon me, lady, I pray you proceed."

"She did follow him, in the vague hope that through the influence of the Princess Joan, whom she sought—travelling alone, and almost all the way on foot from Berwick to Carlisle for the purpose—she might obtain the ear of Edward and supplicate his mercy. She heard the tyrant swear his death, that the warrant had gone, and only recovered from a succession of fainting fits, to return to the prison of her husband, with whom she remained till they came to prepare him for the scaffold. The Earl of Gloucester hoped to have borne her from the tower before the crowds had collected, but, from unavoidable detention, they became so impeded and surrounded that retreat was impossible, and the wretched girl witnessed all, all which a tyrant's cruelty inflicted on her husband."

An exclamation of horror burst from Sir Amiot, but still he signed to Isoline to proceed.

"Still she sunk not, although her only thought seemed the desire to repeat my murdered kinsman's last words to the king; the mind indeed seemed wandering, but not utterly a wreck.

Under charge of old Dermid, the seer and minstrel of our house, from whom I heard this painful tale, she proceeded to Scotland, her aged conductor harassed by the most fearful anxiety lest the Earl of Buchan, who had discovered his daughter in the supposed page, and who had sworn she should bitterly rue her union with a Bruce, should track their wanderings, and, by obtaining possession of her person, throw the last drop of gall in her already bitter cup. He heard that he was close at hand, by some remarks he had caught in their last halting-place, believed their persons were known, and all was lost; still he proceeded, but was at length compelled, by the increasing exhaustion of Agnes and the advance of night, to seek shelter in a lonely house lying in the thickest part of the woods of Carrick. There for a few brief hours he believed they were safe, when the quickly excited ear of the poor girl caught the trampling of horse, and though she was not sensible of the danger which in reality threatened her, it appeared to excite her in no common degree. Dermid has told me the agony of that moment was to him as a whole life of suffering, for no thought was in his mind save of the tyrant earl. Judge, then, his relief, his joy, when, instead of the dreaded figure of Buchan, King Robert himself entered the room, and Agnes recognized him at once, though the effort to *speak* the words which pressed like molten lead on her heart and brain was utterly useless, and laid her senseless at his feet."

"But were they spoken?" murmured the knight, his voice well-nigh suffocated.

"Yes, after a long, long interval of utter unconsciousness. The agony of the king, on learning from Dermid all that had chanced, that the brother he absolutely idolized, till he seemed to feel him brother, son, and friend in one, had fallen in *his* cause and by the hangman's cord—agony no words can describe; for that noble spirit seemed bowed, crushed to the very earth beneath it, and his every effort vain to rouse it. The sight of him, his grief, appeared to rouse Agnes for the time, and with tearless eye and unfaltering voice she repeated, word for word, all that Nigel had spoken the last night they spent together. Not alone his message to the king, but his impassioned dreams, his prophetic visions for the future welfare of Scotland and success of her king, his own joy in death for them, his fervid hopes for and belief in that world on whose

threshold he stood—rapidly as one impelled she spoke; but there was no change in the low almost unearthly voice, no quivering in the eye, no glow in the death-like cheek, and when she ceased, voice, consciousness, and life itself seemed to depart, and for three years she thus remained. But for the wandering eye, the low, fearful whisper which had no meaning, the sigh that often burst from her breast, unconsciously—for she would start and look round as marvelling whence it came —it seemed as if existence itself had departed, that she lived not; and yet, oh, it was not the blessed calm, the joy of death, which all who loved her prayed might be her portion."

"But where was she these three years? and how, oh how came she as she is now?" inquired Sir Amiot, strangely moved.

"You shall hear. My royal uncle, whose devoted love for his murdered brother seemed now divided between his memory and this poor unhappy girl who had *so* loved him, could not at first bear the idea of parting from her, wishing himself to watch over, tend her, as Nigel's last words had implored him to do, and as his own heart prompted, but becoming at last convinced, by my mother's advice, that it was far better she should be left in some safe and kindly keeping till his affairs were more prosperous, placed her in charge of the Abbess of St. Clair, superior of a convent among the mountains and lakes of Inverness, and an aged and faithful kinswoman of our own. There, from time to time, the king and some of us have visited her, but until nearly two years ago there was no sign of change either of mind or body. Had maternal kindness been of aught avail, the abbess's gentle care and love would long ere then have been successful, but, alas! the disease was too deeply rooted· and my uncle's anguish was so fearfully renewed every time he beheld her, that at last, for his sake as well as hers, we felt death would be indeed a blessing. Look at him now, and if thou deemest the expression of that noble face even now is pain, think what it must have been formerly, when I tell thee the feeling with which he looks upon her now is absolutely joy, compared to what it has been."

Sir Amiot followed her glance. On the first appearance of Agnes within the tent, King Robert had quitted the side of his niece and hastened towards her, and he now stood with his arm round her slender waist, his head bent down caressingly, as her sweet colorless face was turned up to his, her two hands resting

clasped on his bosom, and a faint smile beaming in her eyes and round her lip, giving both face and attitude the semblance of a child, whose only consciousness was love and confidence in him against whose heart she leaned. There was deep, touching sadness on the monarch's face, despite the smile with which he sought to answer hers; sadness that confirmed, at a momentary glance, the words of Isoline. Sir Amiot read all a brother's love, all the harrowing memories of the past which that face conjured up, and he read, too, how devotedly, how even as a father the sovereign looked on her, and cherished, fostered, aye, and grieved over that awful affliction, as if in very truth she were his own, own child. Where was the warrior, as he thus bent over her? where the triumphant sovereign, the glorious savior of his land? Vainly might these things have then been sought; he stood and seemed but the mourning father of an afflicted, but from that very affliction an idolized child.

Sir Amiot gazed, and there was such a gush of grief upon his heart, such a wild torrent of impetuous feeling sweeping over his spirit, threatening, an he gave it not vent, to crush him to the earth, that the whole scene danced before his eyes, the very lights grew dim; he saw naught but a well-remembered chamber far, far away from that spot, and that face, that sweet face, not as it was now, and another answering to the endearing name of "mother!" from that fair girl, and from——And what was it he longed to do? to clasp that lovely being to his throbbing heart, to fling himself before King Robert, and swear yet deeper, dearer homage, for oh, he had but dreamed he loved the king before, now only was it that he felt its depth. Well it was that mask in part concealed his features, the convulsed lip, and starting eye indeed could scarcely be concealed; but by those around him such emotion was easily attributable to the sad tale he heard, repeated as it was in such thrilling tones of sympathy by the beautiful, the gifted Isoline.

"And the change we see, how came it?" at length he asked, though the effort to speak calmly caused his very brain to reel.

"How it came indeed none may know, but gradually it took place, so gradually, that indeed the final change seemed to startle by its suddenness. Rather less than two years since she became so alarmingly ill, that the abbess sent for the king, imagining that the last change was taking place, and the beautiful spirit about to be released; but we were all mistaken, she re-

covered with a suddenness that seemed unnatural, and from that hour has been as thou seest now, even as a child, save that, alas! there is no awakening intellect, naught that may promise the summer shall be beautiful as the spring, the flower as the bud."

"Hath she no memory of the past? no feeling of the present?" inquired the knight.

"There are moments, when it would seem the memories of the past occasion paroxysms of agony, although the actual cause of that agony appears undefined; she speaks as if continually expecting a beloved one, looking for his return from distant lands or worlds it may be, anticipating his summons, and then sinking into despondency that it is so long delayed. For the present, her strongest feeling is affection—clinging, caressing, confiding as a child's for a parent—for the person of the king; from the moment she recovered from the sudden illness I mentioned, and the present change took place, this feeling appeared to take possession of her. She will sit for hours in his tent, on a low seat by his side, her hands on his knee, and looking up in his face, as thou sawest just now, seldom speaking, seemingly quite contented to be near him, and when compelled to be separated, as during his last expedition into England, she yielded indeed because he besought her to remain with my mother and myself till his return; but she wept when he was gone, and would not be comforted."

"And can you account for this affection, lady?"

"Some believe it to have arisen simply from his love for her, which, despite her affliction, she is quite conscious of; for myself, I believe there is yet another and more powerful cause. I have always fancied a strong family likeness existed between the king and my kinsman Nigel."

"And you imagine she too perceives this, and is drawn closer to him, though she herself could not tell you why? It is likely, very likely," interposed the knight.

"I do think so; and more, that in the faint shadowy outlines which her mind bears of the past, there are still some dim associations connected with him as King of Scotland, which combine to draw that link closer. I have thought this still more strongly from observing her, when he is about to join in battle, or expects any meeting with the foe; a spirit almost of prophecy comes upon her, and she dismisses all thought of defeat,

as a thing impossible, repeating the last inspiring words of her husband, as if she felt and believed them the voice of heaven granted to herself."

"And does she ever say who originally spoke them? ever at such times allude to him?"

"Not in actual words; but it is ever after such a spirit of prophecy has come upon her that the paroxysm of agony returns, as if a black shapeless mass of memories arose before her, all of woe, but not one distinct."

"Is there none other whom she affects besides the king? It is strange, clinging to him as you describe, I have never seen her until now."

"Hardly strange, Sir Amiot, for the year you were close by the person of my royal uncle she had not joined us; until the king held a temporary court at Dumbarton, you were generally with my uncle Edward or Lord Douglas, and at court she was kept apart from all, save ourselves: the king could not bear her affliction to be seen and cavilled on. During the retreat to the north, and the late expedition, she was with my mother, myself, and others, in the convent of St. Clair. That she is more susceptible of feeling, of passing emotion, than during the first three years of her affliction I quite believe, but I know not if she affects any one very particularly, with the sole exception of the king; and latterly, perchance, myself."

"Thee—doth she love thee, sweet lady?" interrupted her companion, with startling earnestness; then hastily checking himself, added, more calmly, "no marvel that she should, thou, who art kind to all, wouldst show yet double kindness to that poor afflicted one, and wrecked as is the spirit, it may be conscious yet of that; thou art, thou wilt be kind to her," he added, almost unconsciously.

"I were indeed no woman, were I not," answered Isoline, controlling her surprise. "I loved her when but a child I seemed to her, and now, in her affliction, oh, she is doubly dear."

She broke off somewhat abruptly, and perceiving the eyes of Agnes wander, as in search for some one, hastily advanced towards her; urged by an irresistible influence, Sir Amiot followed.

"Sweet one, thou hast shunned me: I have come to chide," said Isoline, softly, as Agnes laid her hand on hers, and looked

up in her face without speaking. "Wherefore linger in this one spot so long? 'tis a gay and pleasant scene, mine Agnes."

"He was here, they told me so; I came to him," was the answer, to catch which Sir Amiot had bent forward, and the voice that spake it was of a wild and thrilling sweetness, as the carol of a bird.

"And was there none else you sought? Shame, shame on you, dear girl!"

"Oh yes, there is one I always seek, but he will not come to me here. I do not hear his whisper, it is too soft, too sweet to pierce through tones as these—he is floating above me in the blue and shapeless space, and he has his golden harp slung round his neck, and he draws forth such loving, lingering tones; oh, they will not sound here, it is too narrow, too confined—I cannot hear them, cannot see him now. When, when will he come for me? he smiles so often on me, aye, and seems to beckon. When shall I go to him? why cannot I go now?" and Isoline drew her closer to her heart in silence, for the dark cloud had come upon her brow—it passed, and again she spoke. "Why wear ye these flowers, Isoline? I love to say your name, it is so sweet. But why wear these? oh, they are such sorrowful flowers!"

"Sorrowful, dearest? wherefore? Is not the bluebell our own hale Scottish flower, and the mountain heath, too, its own true emblem?"

"The heath—call ye this heath? Oh yes, I have plucked it on the mountain and the glen, and woven bright garlands to woo back my own truant love, and chain him by my side, and he has hovered over me and smiled, but he might not come. I love that flower—it is free and fresh, and true, like him; but these, these"—she pointed tremblingly to the bluebells—"oh, they are no buds for love; he plucked them for me once, and they withered as I touched them, and lay dead and faded, and they told what my heart would be, and I would not have thine like it, sweet Isoline; for though I smile, oh, it feels such a strange smile, it seems as if I had other smiles once, but I know not when, and my heart throbs as if it were not always withered as it is now, and those flowers always speak mournfully, but they look too fresh, too bright, for a gift of love."

"They were no gift of love, sweet one; my own hand plucked them from the dewy grass."

"Ah, then they will not die yet; but do not take them from a hand of love, Isoline, they will part you from joy as they do me. Oh, I see him sometimes so near me, I feel as if I could spring to his arms, and then, oh, a flowery chain divides us—they fall at my feet, and then he has gone."

"Are they indeed so ill-omened?" fell from Sir Amiot's lips, in a low yet distinct voice, as he looked a moment from the form of Agnes to the flowers he wore. She started at his voice, raising her head from the bosom of Isoline, and passed her hand across her brow, while for the space of a minute the countenance so varied in expression as to cause both the king and Isoline to look at her in alarm.

"Who spoke?" she asked at length, in a voice so changed that it seemed almost the voice of awakened consciousness; "who spoke?"

"It was I, lady," answered the knight, and lifting up his face to hers, so that the full and tearful glance of his dark eyes met hers.

"A gallant soldier, sweet one!" continued the king, perceiving that the troubled expression continued, and dreading a recurrence of those paroxysms to which Isoline had alluded, and which often came, excited from little or no cause; "one whom I hold in high favor; thou dost not know him, love."

Again she passed her hand over her brow, the shade deepened a moment, a convulsive motion quivered round the lip, and glazed the eye wildly on his; but then as suddenly it relaxed, the eye resumed its varying light, the features their unsettled yet softened play, and a low, musical laugh escaped her.

"It was a wild fancy, sweet Isoline. I dream sometimes of such strange things, and they come with such pain, too, here and here," she placed her hand alternately on her heart and nead; "but I am not in pain now; it did not last long this time. And what was it brought it—do you know?"

"Was it the voice of a stranger, dearest?"

"A stranger? it might be, but it was not *his*. Oh, no, no! It is only when I am alone he speaks to me, and tells me how much he loves me still, though he cannot come to me yet. But some other voice came to me then. Methought I was a child again, and such bright forms fleeted by me, flashing out of such deep darkness; but they are all gone, all gone now," and with

the swiftness of thought she threw her arms round the neck of Isoline, and wept like an infant.

"Come with me, mine own love; we will go forth a brief while and look out upon the night; thou lovest to gaze upon the stars, sweet Agnes. Wilt thou come?"

"Yes, yes! it is silent, holy there. Oh, I cannot bear these sounds; a moment since I loved them, but they are too harsh, too mournful now."

Sir Amiot hastily and silently stepped aside for them to pass; and strange was it that when the eye of Lord Douglas rested with increased reverence and love on the lovely form of Isoline, always majestic, always noble, but at that moment, as she tenderly supported the bending form of her afflicted friend with all a woman's sympathy—it was strange, we say, that at such a moment Sir Amiot scarcely saw her; that his look, which, if seen, would have betrayed impassioned agony, saw but one of those lovely beings, and that was Agnes.

Attended by King Robert, they disappeared behind the curtain of the tent, and for a moment Sir Amiot remained spell-bound where he stood. He was roused by the bluff and gleesome voice of Lord Edward Bruce, demanding wherefore he stood so idle there, when all the laws of chivalry were impeaching him as traitor to the fair. He strove to answer, but his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, his brain reeled, and there came but an unintelligible sound.

Perceiving such evident suffering, the kind-hearted warrior rallied him no longer, and Sir Amiot controlled himself sufficiently to walk calmly from the tent. He stood a moment beneath the starlight vault of heaven, the fresh breeze playing delightfully on his heated brow; suddenly the mournful accents of the unhappy Agnes fell on his ear again, sweet as he had heard them first. He saw her light form, seeming yet more spirit-like in that vast and beautiful expanse of hill and valley, clothed in the solemn drapery of night, than it had been even in the illuminated tent; and that deep anguish came back upon his soul, heightened by the notes of music floating from within. He darted from the spot, springing over crag and bush, till nor sound nor sight of man was near, and then he flung himself upon the glistening grass, and the bold, the brave, the unmoved warrior buried his face in his trembling hands and sobbed aloud.

CHAPTER III.

King Robert's power was fast increasing. Perth was gained, another link in Scotland's chain was broken, yet the desires of the husband and father remained as far from completion as ever. Some prisoners of consequence, indeed, were taken, but none of such importance as to demand the Scottish prisoners for their exchange, and the king and his gallant companions were in consequence compelled to rest content with the heavy ransoms offered by the knights themselves for their release.

Although several soldiers and officers were quartered in the city, and King Robert himself, at the earnest entreaty of the loyal inhabitants, took up his residence for a few days in the Abbey of Black Friars, yet the principal encampment was still without the town, both officers and men preferring the free scope of heaven to the confinement of the city. The king's pavilion was there also erected, and there he speedily returned, as much for the sake of Agnes—who, though she would not leave him, appeared unusually sad in the monastery—as his own. The fit of prophecy had come upon her as usual, when he marched forth with his warriors to the storming of the city, and the crushing agony which followed appeared to have lasted longer than heretofore. On returning to the camp, however, and permitted unrestrainedly to wander where she would, she gradually returned to her usual mood.

Some few weeks after the capture of Perth, the Knight of the Branch found himself, early one lovely morning, roving idly amid the glens and woods on the outskirts of the camp. He had sought them with no particular purpose, save to disperse the feverish sensations, both of mind and body, with which a restless night had oppressed him, and therefore found the fresh, springy breeze of October particularly grateful. Absorbed for a while in his own thoughts, which by his elastic step might be imagined somewhat less sad than usual, the song of the birds, the rustling of the falling leaves, the silvery murmur of many mountain streams came sweetly harmonized upon his ear, without creating any distinct images, until they were joined by a sweet, thrilling, human voice, which caused him not only to

start and pause, but dashed the more pleasing emotions of the scene and hour with inward and outward agitation. It was strange, the effect that voice ever had on Sir Amiot, alike when it found him alone or surrounded by his comrades, though in the latter case it was always more carefully and painfully suppressed. On most men, indeed, those tones ever thrilled to the inmost soul, bringing for the moment, even to the rudest soldier, sensation of pity, almost of awe. They seemed something so unlike the voice of earth, so piercing in their sweetness, even when their words were choked by tears, that they told their tale well-nigh before their speaker was perceived. Sir Amiot ever appeared to start and quiver beneath their spell, as if it were not alone mere sympathy in the sufferer, but that he himself, by some strange magnetic influence, *felt* the pain, the full knowledge of which was lost to her.

Nor was the effect this morning less painful than heretofore: every other thought now became merged in one. He gazed round him hastily and inquiringly, but his vision was bounded by the intricate windings of his woody path, and though the voice had sounded clear, and at no great distance, he could not see the being whom he sought. Again he listened, rapt, entranced, but naught save the voice of Nature at that moment met his ear.

"Was it a dream, a fancy?" he thought; "no, no. Oh, it came upon my heart too painfully for that. Agnes, mine own dear Agnes!"

Another moment, and he stood before the object of his search, and then he suddenly paused, fearing to alarm her. She was seated on a mossy bank, on a wild spot, varied by rock and shrub and flower, overlooking a wild glen beneath. Her wavy hair was uncovered and unconfined; but it was so fine, so golden, that it gave no appearance either of wildness or heaviness to the delicate form and features it shaded; it did but enhance the spirit-like effect with which she ever burst upon the heart and sight. Sir Amiot watched her ere he ventured to approach. The deep blue eye at times rested on the flowers, at others fixed itself on the fleecy clouds floating above her, with a gaze intent, almost fearful in its love. Then again, with the rapid transitions of disordered intellect, Sir Amiot saw her glance fixed on a bunch of flowers growing on the summit of a rock near her, and much beyond her reach. Her eye

sparkled with sudden glee, and she sprung up as to catch them, but failing, he heard her murmur as a child—

"If he were here, good King Robert, he would get them for his poor Agnes; there is not a thing she wants he will not give her, except one, and that he cannot, for he cannot see my beloved, only I can see him. I would he were here; those flowers would charm my beloved to me, or bear me up to him; he loved flowers, and he smiles on them still."

She looked wistfully and sadly on them, and Sir Amiot, well-nigh choked by his emotion, lightly and hastily advanced, sprung up the crag, gathered, and, kneeling, laid them at her feet. She caught them with a musical cry of glee, pressed them to her lips, and then to her bosom, and then looked, half-wonderingly, half-gayly, on the stranger knight.

"Why do you kneel to me, kind stranger? I have no smiles and merry jest with which to thank you, as Isoline; yet I am not ungrateful. I would weave you a lovely wreath with them, but that they are promised to another."

"Agnes!" murmured the knight, with the wild hope that his voice might startle as it had at first, but it did not, for it was almost inarticulate. "Agnes! oh, look on me; am I too unknown?"

He removed the mask; he fixed on her the full-speaking gaze of those large dark eyes; he caught her dress as to detain her, and his hand, unconsciously closed in supplication, but he looked in vain; her eye wandered over his features, with the half-shy, half-admiring gaze of a child, but there was no recognition in its glance.

"Know thee! oh, Agnes does not know any one now but King Robert and Isoline. I see many goodly forms and noble knights pass by, and they look kindly, but they are like figures in a dream; I think I know them, but I do not; and thou, too, sir knight, I only feel thou wert kind to give me these sweet flowers, and that makes me think I know thee."

"Look on me, look on me!" reiterated the knight, becoming more and more agitated. "Oh! can it be that even to the voice of one who, for sixteen years, shared the same love, the same blessing, who knew not a joy apart from thee—hath *my* voice too faded from thy memory—hath it no echo, no memory of the past?"

"The past!" repeated Agnes; "what mean you by the

past? Sometimes I hear men speak of past, of future, but I know not what they mean. Memory—oh, perchance, once I had a memory, but it must be a strange, sad thing; for when I *weep* they wisper that 'tis memory."

"And is it not?" asked her companion, endeavoring to control emotion so as to follow her wandering thoughts, and turn them to the wished-for channel; "wherefore dost thou sorrow else?"

"Oh, no; I do not weep for any cause. Sometimes there comes a sharp, convulsive pain across my brain and heart, and then when it goes I weep, I know not why; and then sometimes I see nothing but such deep, deep darkness, with no shape, no form, and then beautiful shadows arise before me, and I try to clasp and love them, but they go, they pass into the darkness, and then I weep that they are gone."

"And knowest thou those shadows, sweet one—take they no form? Wherefore wouldst thou love them?"

"Because they smile on me; they come upon my heart and nestle there, and then my soul folds her fibres round them, and tries to hold them, and bleeds and quivers when they go; it is strange, for I do not know them—I know not why I love them."

"Have they no voice, no name?" faltered Sir Amiot.

"Once methought I heard them speak, and then, oh, it was so strange, I was in another lordly chamber, and they were round me, and another *too*, but that could not be, for his dwelling is in air—he was too pure and beautiful for earth—he bent down to love me, and called me to him; and I feel sometimes as if he clasped me to his bosom, and pressed his kisses on my cheek, though the mist is round him and hides him from me; and when I would remove that veil, oh, there is nothing—nothing there, he has flown back again to his viewless home; he is sailing again on the fleecy clouds."

Her voice sunk into mournfulness, sweet and thrilling, and she resumed her seat on the mossy bank, and drew the flowers round her, and looked a while on them, then up to the blue heavens, and shook her head, murmuring sadly—

"He has gone—gone now; he only comes when Agnes is alone. Why do you weep, sir knight? oh, do not weep; you should be happy, for you are kind and good. Why should you weep?"

"Say but you love me, though you know me not!" burst from the knight's lips, as in impassioned agony he buried his face in her lap and wept aloud. "Oh, Agnes, Agnes! the only being near me who might love me, on whom I might pour forth all, all the rushing tide of natural love within me—to find thee thus, even by thee unknown—unloved. No claim on thee, naught that can awake that slumbering intellect, and bid thee love me—me, whom in former years thou didst so love, so cling to; no joy was perfect unless I might share it—me, who shared thy infant cradle, thy childhood's mirth, thy youth's confiding love; who knelt with thee to ask a parent's blessing. Agnes, mine own, my beautiful! oh, look on me, know me, love me, an thou wouldst not see me weep."

"His own, his beautiful," she repeated; "who speaks such words to me but one? and oh, thou art not he." She passed her hand over his features, lingeringly and touchingly gazing on them, and murmuring, "Oh, no, thou art not he; his hair was richly golden, and thine is black as a raven's wing; and his eye was blue, oh, blue as his own native sky, and so soft, so loving, and thine is black and restless; he is of heaven, and thou of earth. Oh, no, I am not thine, sir knight, I am his, only his."

"But was there none other that loved thee—none other whom thou didst love? Look upon me, sweet one. The shadows that come before thee, have they no substance apart from him—have they no form, no semblance that mine may fill? Oh, speak to me."

"Oh, they are too shadow-like to resemble thee! there is one, with jetty hair and sparkling eye, but his cheek is soft and rosy as a child, and his step as light, his laugh as joyous; he has no dream of sorrow, and his voice is full of mirth—it hath no tones of depth and woe and care like thine: oh, no, they have no likeness upon earth, their land is that of shadows. Do not weep, sir knight; I would love thee if I could. But why dost thou ask me? Ah! poor Agnes hath no spirit now, it hath gone up to my own faithful love, and she would follow it; she hath no home on earth. Why dost thou love me?"

"I had a sister once, and she was like to thee," faltered Sir Amiot, clasping her hands in his, and gazing fearfully in her face. "Agnes, sweet Agnes, let me love thee for her sake Think, hadst thou a brother, how he would love thee."

"A brother! Do brothers love so dearly? oh, yes, King Robert loved his. See, see, he smiles upon me; he scatters flowers, immortal flowers, to weave the wreath for him. Dost thou not see? oh, no, thou canst not, he only comes to Agnes. I will go gather fresher leaves, and he will hover nearer then. Do not follow me, kind stranger; he smiles through a mist when any one is by; he speaks to me when no other voice is near, and, hark! he called me, he beckons me. Oh, I will go —my own love, I come, I come!"

Her eyes were again fixed, with the full, earnest, intense gaze Sir Amiot had seen before; they moved as if following the object which alone they saw, and then she gathered up her flowers, and sprung lightly to her feet, looked once more on vacancy, smiled, and, stretching out her arms, darted lightly from the rocky platform, and disappeared behind some rocks and brushwood on the opposite side.

Sir Amiot remained where she had left him, prostrate on the grass, his head leaning on the seat she had quitted, and buried in his hands, while the convulsive heavings of his chest told how deeply and painfully he was moved. There was a slight rustling among the bushes, a hasty step, but he heard it not, lost in the unutterable bitterness of grief.

Now it so happened that destiny, fate, or chance, by whatever name she chooses to be called, had led the Lady Isoline a ramble that morning, and tempted her to sit down and rest on a rock, out of sight, but within hearing of almost all that had passed between Sir Amiot and Agnes. Almost all, perchance, we should not say, because had it been so, her conclusions would certainly have been other than they were; as it was, it was precisely those broken words of Sir Amiot which were the most difficult to be understood that were borne to her unwilling ear, and held her, despite her every effort to pursue her ramble, spell-bound where she sat. Sir Amiot spoke of love, impassioned, fervent love; he seemed to be alluding to the past, but how she could not catch, and darker and darker did the web of mystery close around him. She had heard the words, "my own, my beautiful," addressed to Agnes, coupled with a wild appeal that she would know and love him, and she could bear no more, and with a desperate effort had turned from the spot, vainly endeavoring to reduce her thoughts to order. Could it be that in an unhappy, an unreturned affection

for Agnes of Buchan had originated that deep melancholy which marked the young knight's demeanor? that would indeed account for his extraordinary agitation at first beholding her, his anguish at hearing of her affliction, and now that she was free, might he not, in the wild unreasonableness of passion, speak to her as she had overheard? But how, then, did this agree with the tenor of his oath, the rescue of one dearer than life itself; how could she connect the two? Thought sprung from thought, till her mind became more painfully bewildered than before.

"Am I not a fool, worse than fool, tormenting myself thus?" she said, unconsciously thinking aloud. "What is it, what can it be to me? Why am I sunk so low as to think thus of one who evidently shuns me, fearing, perchance, my favor should bid him forget former and dearer ties?" And then would she recall the wishes of her uncle the king, that she should favor the suit of Douglas. "Learn to know my gallant soldier," he had said to her, "and thou wilt learn to love him. I tell thee, Isoline, next to the freedom of my country, the liberation of my wife and child, there is naught I so desire as to call James of Douglas by a yet nearer and dearer name than friend; reward him as his high merits demand, I could not, did I give him half my kingdom. I would, indeed, it were my daughter that he loved, for even her I would bestow upon him. Then thou who art in truth my daughter in love, as if thou wert in blood, think on the joy it would be to me to confer the happiness he so richly merits by the gift of thee. Do not believe love only springs to life in a flash; there is that which riseth slowly through the folds of esteem, and may in some degree be tutored into being. Learn to love the Douglas, my gentle Isoline, and not alone on him wilt thou confer a jewel of imperishable price, but on thine uncle Robert happiness without alloy." And the wishes of the king were echoed in the hearts of her parents, Sir Niel and Lady Campbell; yet had she loved the Douglas, scarcely would the interview of Sir Amiot and Agnes have occasioned her so much pain.

But we may not linger on the thoughts or feelings of Isoline; bitter and most painful as they were to her, to our readers, in truth, they would be indefinable. Suffice it, that though wholly unable to reconcile Sir Amiot's manner to herself with the words she had overheard him use to Agnes, she resolved

on never permitting herself to waver in the belief that he was either actually betrothed, or that his affections were irrevocably engaged, and that in consequence she herself was perfectly safe, and might talk with him or accept his services just as securely as she could with the Earl of Lennox or Lord Hay. She believed herself to be clothed in the invulnerable armor of indomitable pride, which would no more dream of loving, where there was no love to be had in return, than of loving at the command of another.

No alteration, therefore, took place in her manner, either to Sir Amiot, his companions, or Lord Douglas, whose devotion was so sincere, so respectful, yet so unobtruding, that she could find no excuse whatever to banish him from her side; and there were times, when the restless fancies of her ever-active mind oppressed her almost to pain, she almost wished she could give Douglas the love he desired, and in that feeling find mental rest.

CHAPTER IV.

Time passed swiftly and brilliantly for the patriots of Scotland, who beheld, at the close of every month, unanswerable signs of their all-conquering arms. Castle after castle fell before the king or his leaders; nay, untaught, undisciplined countrymen, inspired by the same spirit, turned their pruning-hooks into spears, and marching forth on the same errand, unostentatiously yet ably aided Bruce, by subjugating and delivering into his hands the strong castle of Linlithgow and some others. Roxburgh fell before the skill and prowess of Douglas, whose exploits rather increased than lost in brilliancy with every passing year. There was a spirit of love and hope within him, unconsciously infusing his whole being. Latterly, in the brief intervals which his constant absence from court permitted him to spend with the object of his affections, her manner had appeared to him gentler, kinder; he could not indeed have defined wherefore or why it so seemed, for if he ever ventured to breathe the subject nearest his heart, her words bore the same tendency they ever did, never verging in the smallest degree on encouragement, nay, quite the contrary, and yet, strange constancy, Lord Douglas hoped still. That

she could love another never entered his wildest dreams; in truth, whom could she love? He knew her well enough to feel assured not one of the gay flatterers around her possessed sufficient attraction to satisfy that heart. Once he might have feared Sir Amiot, but lately even that fear had departed: they were very seldom together, for like himself, that knight's known and valued prowess seldom permitted his remaining idle in King Robert's court. Douglas was as lowly-minded as he was brave; but he was not blind to his own merits, to his own superiority to many of his companions, and therefore it was not much marvel, believing the Lady Isoline's affections still free, he should hope in time to gain them.

The end of the year 1312 beheld every Scottish fortress in the hands of King Robert, except two, Edinburgh and Stirling. For the reduction of the former, the king dispatched his nephew Randolph, with a picked band, hoping much from his known skill and bravery, yet scarcely daring to anticipate success from the impregnable fastnesses of nature on which the castle stood. Douglas was at that time engaged in the neighborhood of Roxburgh, whose fortress he had just reduced; other of the Bruce's leaders were scattered in various parts of Scotland, and the king himself, for the time being, held his court at Dumbarton, and there, with Lady Campbell and her daughter, was the afflicted Agnes, for, as we have noticed, she never now was without increased unhappiness when absent from King Robert's side. Wherever his rapid movements and continued successes called him, there did she find her home, and there her chief delight; and now at Dumbarton, as in the beautiful vicinity of Perth, her sweet voice had lost itself in song, her fair hands had wreathed fresh garlands for her love. Sent thither with dispatches by Randolph, Sir Amiot, on his arrival, was somewhat surprised to perceive the air of disquiet and confusion which appeared to reign among the domestics and soldiery scattered about the outer courts of the castle. To all his inquiries, he could only glean that the English had been in the neighborhood, committing ravages, making some prisoners, and the king himself had gone forth to follow and chastise them.

Without reply, Sir Amiot, closely followed by his page, hastened on, crossing the inner and outer ballium, over the drawbridge, and was in the act of dismounting, when, cloaked

and veiled, attended by some followers, as if returning from beyond the castle walls, the Lady Isoline Campbell hastily advanced, as about to enter within the massy gates. The young knight sprang from his steed in an instant, and was at her side, with a greeting unusually eager, as if the delight of thus meeting her had startled him from his usual reserve. She was evidently surprised, but neither the surprise nor the anxious thought which evidently engrossed her caused her to forget the dignified composure which had lately characterized her manner.

"His grace is well, and will be glad to see you, Sir Amiot," she said, in answer to his interrogatory; "for of a truth he is aggrieved and anxious in no common degree."

"What, then, has chanced? The English—"

"Agnes, our afflicted Agnes, in wandering, as is her wont, has fallen into their power, and the king has followed, hoping to track their course. You are ill, sir knight."

She had not moved her eye from him as she spoke, but even without that penetrating glance, his emotion must have made itself evident; he staggered back as if a dagger's point had reached him, repeating as if to himself—

"Agnes—God in heaven! Agnes, sayest thou? The villains, the merciless villains! could not her innocence, her affliction, have saved her from them? Which way went they? in mercy tell me, lady! Pardon me," he added, struggling to regain composure, "I have startled, alarmed you; but you know not, you cannot know the anguish of this sudden news. She must not, she shall not be left in their hands; she will droop, she will die. And I—how can I save her?"

His voice grew more and more agitated. Isoline would have spoken words of soothing, but the first word betrayed to her own ear such an utter change in her voice, she dared not trust it further. Sir Amiot's page alone appeared unconcerned.

"My lord, my lord, you have ridden too hard, and are fatigued, or this news would not so unnerve you," he expostulated. "Trust me, the Lady Agnes will speedily be liberated, wherever she may be; there's not a hiding-nook of Scotland I do not know. Pray you, my lord, wait but till his grace returns."

"The boy speaks wisely, Sir Amiot; abide by his counsel,"

said Isoline, composedly, for the huskiness of voice, whatever might have been its cause, had passed. "Pray you pass in; rest thee till the king returns, perchance he may bring us better cheer."

One glance the knight fixed on the lady; it might have been grateful acknowledgment for her kindly words, it might have been something more, but certainly at this moment it was wholly incomprehensible to her on whom it rested, and consequently elicited no reply. Bowing his head in silent assent, he followed her within the castle to the apartments of the Earl of Lennox, hearing by the way a brief detail from Isoline of the disappearance of Agnes. She had been wandering, as she always loved to do, in the wildest, most rocky and woody glens in the vicinity of the castle. Not being aware that some bands of English plunderers were hovering about the country, and conscious of the annoyance it always was to her to be sensible that a guard attended her, King Robert had desired the trusty followers who had her in charge to keep at a distance, and not annoy her by showing themselves unnecessarily. Amidst the rocks and woods around the castle it was difficult to obey this charge, and so silently and suddenly had she been captured, that nothing but a faint, and, at the moment, unnoticed cry had betrayed the truth. They had sought her in every direction, and the failure of their search had alone recalled that cry, and forced the truth on their minds. The king, half-distracted as to the probable effect of imprisonment and ill treatment on the afflicted Agnes, had himself headed a gallant band by daybreak that morning, determined on leaving no spot unsought, though, from the innumerable caves and hollows close at hand, Isoline feared, with little chance of success. She herself, unable to remain quietly under the influence of anxiety, had called her personal followers around her, and searched in all the favorite haunts of Agnes, with the vain hope to find some clue to her fate.

"And blessings on thee for the kind thought and kinder deed, sweet lady!" Sir Amiot had murmured as she thus spoke. "My poor Agnes cannot thank thee for thy love, but I, oh would that I—"

He paused abruptly, conscious that in that moment of excitement he was not master of his words, and the solemn vow of years might be insensibly betrayed. The tramping of many

chargers on the drawbridge, the sound of the Bruce's clarion at that moment announced the return of the king, and broke the pause of emotion which closed Sir Amiot's broken words.

Isoline darted to a window overlooking the court, with the exclamation—

"She may be with them!" too quickly changing into "Alas! no."

The speedy entrance of King Robert and his followers prevented all suggestion, and quickly gave the information required. Successful it was evident they had not been; but from the English prisoners they had captured, they learned sure tidings, which, painful as they were, were better than suspense. Agnes was the captive of a marauding band, who, believing her a person of some consequence, had resolved on conveying her to one of the border towers to demand a heavy ransom; but in which direction the captives could or would not tell. King Robert had returned, determined on collecting his light-armed troops, and marching southward without delay. Sir Amiot's inclination led him to beseech permission to accompany his sovereign, instead of returning to his post in the camp of Randolph; but the latter was a station of so much more danger and honor than the former, that, though the effort was a violent one, he controlled himself, and gave no evidence of desiring other employment than that with which he was charged. Another imperative reason urged this resolution. As his mysterious agitation calmed, he became aware that any such violent demonstration of anxiety as to the fate of Agnes was exposing him very naturally to remarks which he could not answer, drawing upon him yet further notice, and perchance, exposing him to suspicions which were far better averted than encouraged. He was thankful that it had been from the lips of Isoline the startling intelligence had been first received. He little dreamed the effect of *his* emotion upon her. Calmly, then, and seemingly evincing no more interest in the present subject than the other leaders, he listened to the reports they brought; true his heart throbbed with sickening anxiety, for much as she was loved and pitied in all King Robert's camp and court, none, not even the king himself, felt for her as Amiot. Calmly he presented his dispatches, held a long, private conference with the king, received his commands, and as calmly took his leave, resting a few hours, and starting at the earliest dawn once

more for Edinburgh. He wished much for one parting look, one parting word from the Lady Isoline, if it were but to repeat his thanks for the tenderness she ever evinced for Agnes, and to beseech her for some message of relief if the afflicted were indeed restored.

"Yet wherefore," he internally said, as with a sad and heavy heart he rode on some yards ahead of his followers, "wherefore thus speak, when to her, as to all others, my sympathy in my poor Agnes must remain secret as the grave? why do I so continually forget that she knows no more of me and mine than others? Alas! it is my wish that speaks and not my reason. Even were all of mystery removed, might I but step forward in my own person, my own name, how dare I hope? Would the Bruce consent to her union with one of a traitor race, mingle his pure blood with the black, discolored stream that runs through me—would even my mother's merits, her truth, her loyalty, her worth, weigh in such a cause? Alas, alas! better to die, die as my country's soldier, than live as now, nameless, birthless, or if name and birth revealed, both, both a traitor's; revealed, perchance but to be mistrusted by the king, who loves me now; shunned by her, at whose faintest glance my heart springs up, as if it knew not life save then—can it be otherwise? What is one arm, one heart, amid a race of a thousand traitors? Will Robert trust *one* as true, amidst a thousand false? Oh, better to die unknown—better to die, when, as his gallant soldier, he may weep for me! Why has not death found me? I have not shunned it." Darker and darker, for a brief interval, grew his thoughts, but then there came a sudden flash upon them, dispersing their turbid stream; he lifted his head, which had sunk upon his breast—he suddenly clasped his hands, in the enthusiasm of that moment's thought, and murmured, "No, no, I may not wish to die till that I seek is done. Mother, beloved, revered, pardon thy son, that for one brief moment thou wert forgotten, the voice of thy wrongs unheard. For thee, thee alone, I live. I will not shun this wretchedness till thou art free, and then, then—if indeed the misery I dream of be mine own—I can but die—my fate will be accomplished; but now, now, but one thought must nerve, one hope encourage. Mother, thou shalt be free!"

He gave his horse the spur, as if indeed the goal he sought were near, and ere his thoughts returned to a calmer channel

his page Malcolm urged his steed up to his master's side. The devotion this boy bore to the person of Sir Amiot was something remarkable. He was a sharp, clever lad, in reality of some sixteen or seventeen years, but appearing rather younger; his agility and address we have already seen in a former page (for it is an old acquaintance we have here introduced to the reader), as shown in his devotion to the Countess of Buchan and her son, in enabling the king to rescue the former, and then bearing him intelligence of her second capture. From that time till a few months after Sir Amiot's joining the Bruce he had been like a wandering spirit over Scotland, at one time with the king and his followers in Rathlin, at another, in the court of Angus of the Isles, then in the very midst of the English camp, and repeatedly, when the Bruce returned to Scotland, did the intelligence his wanderings had gathered materially assist the councils and movements of the patriots, until at last his intelligence and alacrity became so remarkable, that many wished to own him as their page or follower, an honor, however, the boy invariably refused, preferring, it appeared, his liberty to the constant service even of the king. It was on returning to the camp, after one of his accustomed wanderings, he discovered that a new cavalier had joined the king, and his curiosity was instantly attracted; whether he had found means to gratify it no one could discover, but certain it was the influence of Sir Amiot had acted on him like a spell, and from that hour his fidelity and devotion to the stranger knight became remarkable. He had as usual quitted the regular line of march, and had been, to the great amusement of some of his younger comrades, and to the discomposure of the older and stricter disciplinarians, curvetting and prancing round and round, often disappearing, as he said, to examine every brake and hollow that they passed, and rejoining the troop when least expected. Many marvelled that Sir Amiot could brook this laxity of order and respect in his personal follower, but his freaks always passed unnoticed, and were generally more productive of good than ill. He now rode up close to his master, saying, as he did so, "Please you, my lord, methinks his grace were better following our track than marching southward; if it please you to put yourself under my guidance, you may be the first to rescue the Lady Agnes yet."

"How! what?" exclaimed Sir Amiot, fairly startled out of

every other thought; "what mean you—there is no trace of such a band?"

"No; such kind of villains love not the open road, as your lordship knows, but there are brakes and hollows enough to our left to harbor double their number. Will you risk it, good my lord? I dare not promise entire success, but even if we fail, it will be but the loss of an hour or two, which Lord Randolph will pardon when he knows the cause, and should we succeed, King Robert will give us absolution. Those English knaves told false; their course lies towards Edinburgh, little dreaming how it is beleaguered."

There was an earnestness about the boy that would have satisfied his master, even had he not been conscious that Malcolm very seldom spoke from bare suggestion. Sir Amiot therefore made no hesitation in altering his line of march, and plunging into the wild desolate country to which Malcolm alluded. Much surprise the resolution occasioned amongst his men, and some discomposure, which latter feeling became very greatly heightened, as hour after hour passed and there was no sign whatever to reward their toilsome progress; even Sir Amiot's patience began to fail, and he somewhat sharply upbraided his page for wiling him on a fool's errand. Malcolm evinced neither anger nor sullenness, but simply observed he had not *promised* success. But the boy knew well enough he had not reckoned without his host; about an hour before sunset they reached a level, unencumbered by wood or rock, and pushing forwards, a band of some fifty or sixty men were distinctly visible, though evidently at full a mile's distance from them; they were closely wrapped in the dark green cloaks peculiar to the marauder of glen and wood, carried no banner, and kept in a close, compact body, though riding at full speed.

"By St. Andrew, thou hast spoken rightly, Malcolm. Forward, in heaven's name!"

"Keep them in sight, keep them in sight, that is all we can do!" shouted Malcolm, as every man spurred on; "overtake them here we cannot, it is an open road to Edinburgh. I hoped to have come upon them in dell and dingle, when we would have given them a taste of Scottish steel, but here it is impossible; only mark where they go."

Sir Amiot heard his words, but his ardent spirit could not

feel the chase impossible. Their horses had been refreshed by above an hour's rest, at intervals, in the woods through which they had passed; a detention against which Malcolm loudly protested, declaring the slow pace they had been compelled to proceed prevented all fatigue, but the men had grumbled, and Sir Amiot's interference in their favor had alone prevented open strife, though he now perceived the cause of Malcolm's great desire to avoid unnecessary delay, and felt provoked for having yielded perhaps more than was needed to his followers. Regret was now vain, and on they went, urging their steeds to the utmost speed, but gaining little on the pursued, who, evidently conscious of their vicinity, flew rather than galloped over the smooth road. The castle of Edinburgh appeared in sight, hailed by both pursuers and pursued. Although the chase led the former some distance from the side where Lord Randolph lay, and exposed them to danger from the castle, neither Sir Amiot nor his men cast one thought on this; nearer and nearer they approached the English, near enough to distinguish the white robes of a female, whom their hearts told them was the Lady Agnes, seated in front of one who seemed the leader, a tall, strong man, mounted on a powerful horse. This sight urged them to yet stronger efforts; they rushed on, they flew over the intervening space; they struggled up the steep ascent; foam covered their gallant steeds, their limbs reeked and trembled under them, but, obedient to the voice and hand of their masters, they relaxed nerve nor muscle on their way. Nearer, yet nearer, within hail, spear in rest, Sir Amiot dashed forward, his lance rung against the armor of the hindmost; shouting his war-cry, he pressed forwards, dealing his blows on every side, but seeking only the centre charger, which bore the form of Agnes; ere he reached it, ere his men could form around him, his opponents had passed the postern, bearing him in the rush along with them; the massy gates closed, the portcullis fell, and Sir Amiot was struggling alone amongst a hundred foes, divided by iron gates and impregnable walls from his followers, who reached the level space beside the postern just in time to see it close, and their lord a captive.

Baffled, stung to the quick by the bitter consciousness of his own imprudence, the Knight of the Branch struggled furiously amongst his captors; nor did his sword drop, his strength fail, until he stood beside the drooping form of Agnes, his arm en-

twined around her. There was a light in her dark blue eyes, a hectic flush on her fair cheek, but she gave no other sign either of sorrow or of fear. She had looked up in the knight's face a moment in inquiring surprise, and seeming to recognize the brilliant flash of his large dark eye, and he heard her murmur—

"How came he here—was it to seek me? but why should he care so much for me? Do not fear, sir knight, they will not, they dare not harm either thee or me. My love is near, though I cannot see him now, and he will save us both, both, for thou art kind to Agnes!"

"Hear me!" exclaimed Sir Amiot, passionately, as, despite every effort of his captors to divide them, he still retained his hold of Agnes. "Hear me, I speak to ye as men, as knights and soldiers, not as the robber band I believed ye! Ye know not the affliction of this poor innocent, or surely, surely ye would not have selected her for prey. The miseries your monarch, the late Edward, inflicted on her and one dearer than her life, hath maddened her—robbed the mind of its precious jewel, and left but this lovely wreck; her only sense of enjoyment is in freedom, unwatched, untended freedom. She can do harm or good to none; let her go free; if ye have but one gentle feeling in your hearts, I implore ye let her go free. Do with me as ye list, but for this poor helpless innocent have mercy! what would ye with her?"

"Ransom, a goodly ransom," answered he who seemed their leader, taking off his helmet, and displaying the features of Sir Magnus Redman, an Anglo-Irish knight, noted for his ferocity and avarice. "Thinks your wisdom we have nothing to do but to take captives and let them go? Thou hast a child's fancy, though a fertile one, sir knight; thou hast coined a pretty sounding tale in a marvellously short time; how know we its truth? The maiden has given no evidence of madness; aye, hath comported herself more submissively and wisely than most of her sex in such cases."

"Look on her!" passionately interrupted Sir Amiot. "Are ye so dulled in sense and sight, as not to read in this sweet, sad face the pitiable truth? Is there aught there save the helpless innocence of affliction? Send her to Lord Randolph's camp, and I swear to thee, by the true honor of a knight and soldier, I will rest me your prisoner till her ransom and mine are both told down, till every claim hath been satisfied; give her free-

dom, and trust me, King Robert will be no niggard of his gold."

"Ha! holds he her safety at so high a rate? You have overreached yourself, most sapient sir; an he would so reward us did we give her freedom, what will he not give to purchase that freedom? We are no chickens to be caught by fair words; she rests within stone walls till her friends choose to send a good round sum for her liberation. Meanwhile, your cavalier errant called king may amuse himself in seeking her through the borders; an he deem her worthy such a stir, we shall but know her value, and demand accordingly. Ha! ha! it were worth some risk to see him scour the borders in search of a bird caged up so blithely here, where his arms can never reach her."

"Villain!" exclaimed Sir Amiot, forgetting all personal danger in his strong indignation. "Brag on as thou wilt, there were sufficient with me to give King Robert note of this poor maiden's fate ere he could reach the border. There thou art foiled, base miscreant! and for this castle, lay not such stress on its strong walls, it will fall yet, and we shall be free, no thanks to thee or thine. Cheer up, sweet one!" he added to Agnes; "'tis but confinement for a brief, brief while—the king will save his Agnes. But wherefore bandy words with such as thee!" he suddenly continued, as he felt Agnes cling closer to him, shrinking from the rude forms who now surrounded them. "Methought Sir Geoffrey de Harcourt was commander here. I demand speech with him; as knight to knight, and gentle to gentle, he will grant me patient hearing. Back, I say! an he have command here, ye must acknowledge his supremacy."

"Sir Geoffrey de Harcourt is a wiser man than your wisdom deems him; we pay good price for our will in the castle of Edinburgh, and he knows his own interests better than to interfere with Magnus Redman and his prisoners. But a truce with this idle parley—part them, I say!"

On the instant it was done. No word or sound escaped the lips of Agnes, as her convulsive, though almost unconscious grasp of Sir Amiot was rudely unloosed. He saw her eyes fix themselves on vacancy, with the wild intense gaze he knew so well, but the object they seemed to search evidently eluded them; a dark shade passed over her countenance, a quick

shuddering through every limb, and he saw her head droop on the shoulder of her conductor, as if all sense were a while suspended. He struggled to spring towards her, but his purpose was frustrated.

"Away with him to the strong tower on the southern wall!" shouted Sir Magnus; and they bore him off with a velocity as almost to prevent his tracing the path they took. They traversed courts, passed many bands of soldiery, who were all too much accustomed to Sir Magnus Redman's predatory expeditions to make any remark; and at length they halted at the entrance of a low square tower, formed of massive stone, overlooking the southern wall and the precipitous crags which it commanded, and conducted the captive knight up several steep flights of stairs to a small chamber, the only window of which, though it commanded a view beneath, was strongly barricaded by cross-barred stancheons of iron. The door, too, was thickly studded with iron nails, locked and double-locked upon him, and the walls of cold, bare stone permitted not the faintest hope of escape.

Sir Amiot could not but feel he had been imprudent in pressing the chase so closely. Now that his mood was cooler, he felt it would have been much wiser to have remained contented with knowing exactly where the Lady Agnes was, and setting his best energies to work, to urge Randolph to push on the siege. He trusted much to the wit and intelligence of his page to give Sir Thomas all the information that was needed, not alone as to his fate, but as to all the causes of his detention and the king's great anxiety for the release of Agnes. Would they think of dispatching a messenger on the instant to Dumbarton, to stay, if possible, the march of the king, was a question returning again and again to his mind, and he paced the narrow precincts of his prison in all the nervous irritability which ever attends the longing desire for rapid movement, when its importance is known, and we ourselves are utterly unable to forward it. The very darkness seemed to chafe him, he wanted to see if the movements of the besieging army were visible from his loophole, and what part of the castle it commanded; he heard nothing that betrayed the vicinity of many soldiers; even the sentinel's tread appeared at some distance and irregular, as if that particular spot were less strongly guarded than the others. He looked eagerly forth, but there

was no moon, and he saw nothing but darkness. Then he tried to compose himself by thinking of Agnes, but there was no composure for him there. He pictured her sufferings in solitary confinement, or under the wardance of harsh and strange guardians, till he almost shuddered, for liberty was no common joy to her, it was actually her life, her being now; her madness lost its sting, her paroxysms of anguish were less and less frequent the more perfect freedom she enjoyed; and so fragile seemed the link between the mortal shell and life, that he knew not what irreparable injury imprisonment and harshness might produce. Then, to escape the anxiety of such thoughts, he tried to turn them in another channel, over which the form of the Lady Isoline hovered like a bright radiant star, which ought certainly to have shed light and hope, but somehow even that light was faint and flickering, and often lost altogether beneath heavy masses of black clouds that would float over his horizon, and yet, if the truth must be told, the knight's thoughts lingered there still more powerfully, more constantly than elsewhere; he would have despaired, simply from his proneness to the desponding and the sad, as he had no hope. However, if he had no hope, memory was kind, for she recalled in that darkness every look and word and varying tone of Isoline so vividly, he more than once felt himself entranced, not even needing the aid of sleep to give them voice and substance; nay, he would rather have shunned sleep, lest it should break the spell—and so passed the night.

The morning gave Sir Amiot the information he desired. Within twenty yards of the tower rose the wall, which, somewhat to his surprise, was there not above twice a man's height. Looking further, it was easy to perceive that the excessive steepness and extraordinary shape and position of the rock at that point had occasioned this, the architect of the castle believing, with some appearance of justice, that crags themselves were sufficient defence, being wholly inaccessible; crags and cliffs jutted out from the main rock on every side; the foundations of the walls themselves appeared scarcely to allow space for a scaling-ladder, shelving down in some parts to a complete precipice, at others, varied by protruding rocks. A single sentinel was there on guard; his march, however, taking a contrary direction to that which Sir Amiot's loophole overlooked. Situated cornerwise, he only saw the wall and crags,

a circumstance occasioning some regret, as he almost fancied the Scottish army might be visible to the sentinel from the top of the wall, though concealed from him.

With the strong feeling of a soldier within him, learned in all military tactics, he could not but admire the impregnable situation of the fortress, and the desire to see it in King Robert's possession became stronger than ever, though its impregnability seemed to whisper how vain was that desire. Still he almost hoped the confinement of the Lady Agnes, and King Robert's earnest desire to obtain her freedom, would urge Randolph to more decided measures than he had yet adopted. It was only by the conquest of the castle he could look to obtaining his individual liberty, for the ransom which he knew his avaricious captor would demand was utterly out of his power to pay, and he saw before him nothing but the dim, shapeless vista of lingering imprisonment, entirely preventing the fulfilment of his vow, while his companions would be gathering fresh laurels, and perhaps the liberation he so earnestly desired to effect by his own right hand, would become the glory of another, and his present doom remain unchanged. Isoline, too, how might he find her, if years passed ere he was free? the wife of Douglas; and though, as we have seen in a former page, he had no hope, or fancied he had none, that she could ever become his, the idea of meeting her as the wife of another was fraught with such intolerable suffering, that his imprisonment and inactivity became doubly hateful. Even the king, he thought, would forget him after a few years—forget his very existence; how could he, with so many gallant officers round him, so many calls upon his head and heart, retain a kindly recollection of all who fell or were imprisoned in his cause? Now these multifarious cogitations were any thing but agreeable, particularly as Sir Amiot chanced to be one of that curious class denominated self-tormentors, ever looking to the dark rather than the sunny side of life. In truth, perchance he had more cause for these fancies than most of his class, for he was peculiarly and mournfully situated, and the long weary hours of his captivity permitted no cheering prospect. He tried to find amusement in polishing his armor—already polished as high as art could make it—but that was but a sad resource. He tried to fancy how a party of daring adventurers might scale the crags just

at that point and mount the wall, and then smiled at the fertility of his imagination, picturing things sober reason felt impossible. The second night of his captivity was partially illuminated by a young moon, whose lights and shadows, playing fantastically on the rocks, excited even his admiring attention. The third night was pitchy dark, neither moon nor star for several hours being visible. Still Sir Amiot remained by his loophole, as if the darkness presented objects either to his bodily or mental eye, preferable to the hard couch and fevered sleep which was his only alternative with this sorrowful vigil. There was a sensation at his heart very like the prognostics of a thunder-storm, a sort of feverish excitement, likely enough to follow the morbid streams of unchecked thought, when indulged in for any length, and unrelieved by words. The cool, March breeze that fanned his cheek through the open spaces of his loophole, however, gave no evidence of thunder lingering in the air, and Sir Amiot remained at his post, looking out on the darkness, till his excited fancy almost made him believe he could distinguish objects, moving masses of darkness round and about the jutting cliffs. There was no sound, not a breath to disturb the perfect stillness, except when, now and then, a fresh breeze swept by, bearing some of the heavy clouds along with it, and making the deep gloom a degree less obscure.

By the length of time since the set of sun, Sir Amiot imagined it must be fast approaching midnight, still he felt no inclination whatever for repose, and remained at his post. If these black, moving shapes were the mere delusions of fancy, their constancy was something remarkable, for however the knight shook himself, rubbed his eyes, nay, even took a turn in his cell, to assure himself he was awake not dreaming, still they were visible. If disappearing, which they often did for some minutes, he traced them again in a different part of the crag, gradually floating—for no other word can give an idea of their motion, at least as it appeared to Sir Amiot—nearer the foundation of the wall. Shape and substance indeed he could not give them, for he could only have described them as small, detached masses of black cloud hovering around and about the cliff. Had any one suggested the idea of human beings, he would have declared it impossible; for, in the first place, they had not the smallest semblance of humanity, though that might have been but the treachery of night; and

the next and more convincing, no human foot could possibly find resting up those crags. That the sentinel either did not see this strange appearance, or if he did, thought nothing of it, at first surprised our hero, and somewhat disagreeably heightened the feeling of superstitious awe he felt, much to his annoyance, creeping over him; but then he remembered that the sentinel's post and line of march did not look in the same direction as his loophole, and so perhaps he really could not see them. More than once he felt almost tempted to shout aloud to the man, and inquire if he saw any thing remarkable about the cliffs, but checked the wish as cowardly folly. They appeared to dive in and out the crags like passing shadows, but there was no light in the heavens to occasion them; and, after some time, Sir Amiot thought he had succeeded in making himself believe they were in fact nothing but illusion, occasioned by the darkness around seeming less opaque against the white cliffs. Just as he thought of retiring, satisfied with this belief, rendered stronger by their having disappeared for a much longer interval than usual, they again became visible, and much nearer the wall, though still presenting nothing to his strained gaze but moving darkness. At this instant the steps of the guard resounded close under Sir Amiot's tower, as they marched on to relieve the sentinel, and see that all was right, and at the same instant, beneath his very eye, those mysterious shapes had vanished into their parent darkness, he believed, for he could not distinguish the faintest trace. Wrought up to a state of almost painful excitement, the steps of the guard absolutely jarred upon his nerves, and he started with undefined terror as he heard a heavy stone thrown from the wall, roll noisily from crag to crag till it reached the precipice, and fell to the ground, followed by the voice of the sentinel, exclaiming—

"Ha! ha! keep close, I see you well!"

Sir Amiot's very respiration seemed impeded as he listened for what might follow, but nothing came, save the joyous laugh of the soldiers, betraying their consciousness of their comrade's jest, and bidding him time it better on another occasion; then followed the sentinel's assertion he had frightened them, however they might deny it, a merry dispute, and the steps passed on, and all again was silence, deep, soundless as the grave. Again the knight looked forth, but for some time, to his fevered

fancy it seemed full half an hour, he looked in vain; and then again, one by one, seeming to glide from behind the crags, those shapes appeared; cautiously, silently they glided nearer; he lost them behind the wall, but not for long, one by one, he saw them stand upon the wall, one, two, and three, and shapeless they were no longer; was it fancy or reality—surely, they bore the forms of men, and one, the first who ascended, could it be, as Sir Amiot's wild imagination pictured, the peculiarly light, bounding form of his own page? He dared not utter a sound; fascinated, entranced as by some spell, his eyes moved not, he breathed thickly and painfully; he counted thirty of those strange shapes ascend, pause a moment on the wall, and descend within it, how, he could not distinguish; they passed beneath his prison so silently, so glidingly, even yet the idea of supernatural visitants remained uppermost, and chilled his very heart's blood, even while it strove to bound up at the thought of liberty. One shape alone remained on the wall, it flew past, disappeared, then came the sound of a brief struggle to his ear, a stifled, quivering cry of death, a heavy plunge, and then again all was silent. He listened intently, almost phrensied by the wild desire to unfold the mysteries of that darkness and silence, to burst his bonds, to join that gallant band, for if they were mortal men, he knew well their purpose. Still there was no sound; every minute felt an hour. Sir Amiot knew not how short a space had, in fact, rolled by since they had disappeared. Was it fancy, or was that silence becoming peopled by distant sounds, waxing louder and more loud, nearer and more near? A moment's indecision, and the next Sir Amiot bounded from his prison-floor, and clasped his hands in ecstasy. "It is—it is!" he shouted. "Brave, glorious Randolph, this is your work! Oh, why can I not join ye? Why am I inclosed—caged? Is there no means of liberty?" and he shook the iron door with violence, but in vain. Every shout that burst upon his ear thrilled through him, as if he too had joined the strife. Wild was the uproar, stunning the din that, breaking the previous stillness, reached even his distant tower, and told of the work without. A thousand torches seemed to flash up through the thick darkness; cries for mercy, shouts of triumph came strangely mingled on his ear; clashing steel, confused sounds as of the very brunt of war, came so close upon him, he felt the strife was carried on beneath his very walls; then came louder and

fuller shouts of triumph; he felt, as by instinct, the gates had been flung open by that secret band, and free entrance given to the awaiting army. It could not have been an hour from the commencement of the strife, when, even in the midst of the din without, Sir Amiot's quick ear discerned nearer sounds, hasty, eager steps bounding up the turret-stair; his heart throbbed violently. Was it liberation, or his vindictive captor armed with death? The one, he knew, was as likely as the other; and who may tell the emotion of that moment? There was the sound of heavy bars removed, hastened evidently by the strokes of a heavy mallet; then came the clash of keys, a suppressed oath, when three or four were tried unsuccessfully, and then a shout of joy in well-known tones. The door flew back, and Malcolm was at his master's feet.

"I thought the villain had died with a lie in his throat, and told me wrong," he exclaimed, concealing all emotion under his usual recklessness; "but he has not, and I thank him. Away, away, my dear master! I hoped to have brought you freedom time enough to give you the pleasure of sharing our glorious game; but I fear me that is over now. We have had but too easy a victory: the ill-fated slaves were all asleep and comfortable, and rushed out in pretty guise, as you may believe. Sir Thomas would hardly permit the gates to be opened till the game were won; thirty armed men against two hundred unarmed and in pitiable confusion, he deemed but fair play; and so the castle is ours, and you are liberated."

"I little dreamed," said Sir Amiot, "those gliding forms of darkness were you and my brave companions; so little did I think it, that more than once I was about to hail the soldier on the wall, and demand if he saw aught, the shapes seemed so to mock me."

"By St. Andrew, my good lord, it was well you did not: that poor sorry fool, the first to go to his account, startled us enough with his ill-timed jest; he little thought his idle words might have so much truth."

"Ha! you heard them then—and the stone?"

"Came thundering down directly over our heads, threatening inevitable destruction had a single man of us moved or stirred; but Randolph was with us, and so calm, so collected, even at such a moment, if there were any thing like fear amongst us, it was stilled at once."

"Then my sight did not deceive me; it was you, my gallant boy, the first to stand upon the wall—I thought it, yet dared not credit it."

"And why not, my lord? I thought you knew there is no mount, no cliff, no wall too steep for Malcolm, an he wills to scale it. Aye, I first, Sir Andrew Grey the next, and Randolph himself, brave heart, the third; he would not trust this daring deed to other than himself, and well deserves to win it. Haste on, my lord, he longs to greet thee free."

And they did haste on, for this brief conference had not detained them in the tower, but took place as they hurried through the courts—how changed in aspect to three days before—towards the keep. The actual strife was over, but the dead and dying English gave fearful tokens of its fierceness and effect, some indeed yet struggled; the clash of weapons was still distinguished at distant intervals, but faint and hesitating. Already the Scotch were busy in clearing the ground, slippery with blood, in securing their prisoners, flinging open all the dungeon doors, and giving liberty to many who had there changed youth for age. Troop after troop of Randolph's men, with banners flying, and heralded by martial and triumphant music, were marching proudly and leisurely over the drawbridge and through the widely open posterns, and meeting in the centre court before the keep; their glittering armor flashing back the blazing light of a hundred torches, their shouts forming a glad, deep bass to the drums and clarions—all presenting a scene of such spirit-stirring interest, Sir Amiot's heart throbbed high with exultation, to the utter exclusion of every saddening feeling. Shout after shout hailed his reappearance; his own followers breaking from their ranks, thronged round him; and Randolph himself, seeing his approach from the entrance to the keep, hasteneed to meet and embrace him.

"Welcome, welcome, most gallant Amiot!" he said, eagerly; "the joy of seeing thee again at liberty banishes the regret that thou wert not at my side in this exciting enterprise. It is but fitting thou shouldst have some share of its glory; though, by mine honor, hadst not thou and the Lady Agnes been within these walls, methinks that paragon of pages had hardly obtained such hearing or such influence. Thou wert made captive in seeking her rescue, he tells me, so 'tis meet and just thou shouldst give her freedom. Thy presence, too, will startle

her less than other of my knights, gallant as thou perchance, but scarce as gentle."

"Thanks for the grateful task," answered the knight, gayly; "but tell me first—the king, has his march to the borders been prevented by the tidings his afflicted Agnes is here?"

"Yes; the boy Malcolm related all that had passed, and I dispatched a messenger back to Dumbarton on the instant; he was just in time, one troop had commenced their march, but were easily recalled. His grace was greatly relieved, but sent word to leave no stone unturned to gain the fortress or her freedom, well knowing what confinement is to her."

"And well hast thou performed thy mission," said Sir Amiot, grasping Randolph's hand with energy. "Noble, glorious Randolph, I could envy thee thy laurels."

"Nay, nay, thou hast plucked too many thyself to grudge me mine," replied the warrior; "besides," he continued, half sadly, "remember, I must gather enough to cover former errors, ere I may wear them as meeds of glory."

Hastily, joyously Sir Amiot sprang up the narrow staircase he pointed out as leading to the turret room where Agnes was imprisoned; they had given him the keys, but he stood and paused a moment, not knowing which door, among several that faced him, led to her. He was not long in doubt, her voice thrilled upon his ear, mournfully, painfully, and low, but still, as was almost always its wont, in broken fragments of song. Sir Amiot could not bear more, there was such an utter hopelessness, such piercing suffering in those low thrilling tones, that even without the words in which she had thrown her thoughts, tears would have arisen, and his hand so shook with emotion, he could scarcely place the key within the lock, or prevent the clashing of the rest. Her voice sunk on the instant, but on his entrance she bounded forward with a cry of joy.

"I am free, then—oh, I am free! I may quit these hateful walls, or thou wouldst not be here, kind warrior. Speak I not truth? oh, tell me I may go hence, go seek my own love among the flowers and streams he loves; it is long, long, oh, so long since I have seen him; he cannot smile on me here. I am free—oh, tell me I am free."

"Free as the breeze thou lovest, free as the mountain stream, sweet lady," answered Sir Amiot, in the low gentle tone she

had learned to understand, and his heart throbbed with a strange pleasure as he felt her cling to his arm, and look up in his face with the loving confidence he had sought for months in vain. To his anxious eye the complexion was more transparent, the features more delicate yet, as if the days of her confinement had left her not untouched, but the change was so faintly perceptible he could not have defined it. That now and then there were symptoms of returning sanity was visible to all; and, indeed, King Robert and Isoline indulged the hope, that one day might see that beautiful mind effectually restored. They saw not, they could not see the form was dwindling more and more into a spirit shape, and that perchance the same day that saw the mind in beauty would wing the soul away.

"Free, free!" she repeated, the musical laugh of glee banishing all sadness from her voice. "Oh, what joy for Agnes! and hast thou done this, gallant Amiot? Oh, that I could give thee the love thou deservest, but I cannot; alas, no! I have no love for earth now, save for King Robert. I see my Nigel hovering round him when he is in danger or in woe, guarding him from peril, beguiling him from grief. He loves Robert, and so then must I. But for thee, what can I do to make thee glad, sir knight?"

"Love me, call me brother!" murmured Sir Amiot, in strong emotion; "dearest, loveliest, call me brother!"

"Brother!" she repeated, and the expression of her features sadly changed; "methinks I had a brother once, but it was long, long since, and he faded away even before my own noble love, who smiles on me from heaven. Brother—no, no, I will not call thee brother, for it makes me sad, and I could weep, I know not why, save that when I hear that word darkness seems to come upon me, peopled only by dreams of pain. But tell me, kind Amiot, what was that sudden noise I heard when I thought every one slept but me, and such a glare of light, and clashing weapons? methought 'twas a dream of that which hath been, for such strange thoughts came with it, such sharp and bitter pain. Hath there been such a noise, or was it but the wild visions of my poor brain?"

"Nay, it was no vision, 'twas real, sweet one. Randolph hath won the castle, hath gained thy liberty and mine, and done King Robert yet nobler service. He fought and won."

"Ha! said I not so?" exclaimed Agnes, suddenly withdraw-

ing herself from the support of the knight, and standing almost majestically erect, a vivid flush on her cheek, her eye glittering in unwonted radiance. "Said I not victory would be ours? When did King Robert strike in vain, since HE said that they should conquer? Strive on, strive on, bold hearts! He who might not fight for ye on earth, blesses ye from heaven. Scotland shall be free, shall be exalted; her king triumphant!"

The brief emotion passed as quickly as it came, followed by a slight convulsion through every limb, and contracting her features as if by sudden and irrepressible agony. Sir Amiot tenderly raised her in his arms, and laid her on the couch. He had now often seen and mourned over these fearful paroxysms, and it did not therefore take him by surprise; he bent over her in commiserating pity, conscious he could do nothing till nature herself gave relief, in the usual burst of agonizing tears. And then he left her, aware that such was always the custom of those who had her in charge, as aught like observation in such moments ever seemed to irritate instead of soothe.

He left the door of her apartment open, trusting that, after the usual interval of internal suffering, the consciousness of perfect freedom would operate beneficially. Nor was he deceived —for the sun had not risen above an hour ere her light form appeared hovering amongst the busy and triumphant soldiers, bearing no evidence of previous suffering, but looking on for a few minutes with the amused and curious look of childhood, and then bounding to the more solitary courts, from mound to mound, and wall to wall, her sweet voice ringing forth in song, rejoicing she was free.

A few words from Randolph sufficed to inform Sir Amiot of all that had passed in his brief captivity. His men, after the first moment of despondency as to their master's fate, and their own utter inability to avert it, urged on by Malcolm, hastened to Lord Randolph's tent, and gave him concise and instant intelligence of all that had occurred since they had left his camp, including, of course, the disappearance of the Lady Agnes, the king's anxiety and resolution to seek her, their discovery of her track, pursuit, and brief scuffle at the postern of the castle, and the fatal effects of Sir Amiot's daring. Randolph heard them with his wonted attention, dispatched a messenger with these tidings instantly to the king, and then set his energetic mind

actively to work in what manner to proceed; for gain the castle he vowed no power on earth should prevent.

The next morning, before daybreak, Malcolm sought him, requesting a private interview, which was granted on the instant. The lad then told him that, during his wanderings and adventures, he had often been in the habit of clambering up the crags on the southern side of the castle and making his way over the wall, which was there very low and unguarded, into the very centre of the fortress; it was thus, mingling in disguise familiarly amongst the English, he had procured the information which he had so loved to report mysteriously to the king or his officers. He had done this, he said, continually in almost every fortress occupied by the English, partly for his amusement, partly in the hope of finding some one whom he loved; but the southern crags of Edinburgh Castle were more familiar to him than any. To make assurance doubly sure, he had employed the night previous in retracing his customary path, and found he had not forgotten one particular concerning it. He had mounted as far as the wall and clambered down again wholly unperceived. He was certain, if Lord Randolph would only trust him, he could lead a select body of daring adventurers to the very foot of the wall, which, with the aid of rope-ladders, they could easily surmount and descend. He acknowledged the path was no easy one, and that there was most imminent risk, for if discovered by the English in the act of descending, they must every one of them inevitably perish; still he felt no fear—and if Lord Randolph would only leave to him the choice of the men, he should see how admirably they would succeed.

For some little time the warrior paused in deep and weighty thought. He did not doubt the page in the very least, for his acuteness and agility had been too often proved, and he knew he was trusted by the king himself. Still the risk was too great, the danger too extreme for him to venture on a resolution by himself alone. He then summoned Sir Andrew Grey, Sir Aleck Fraser, and one or two others noted for their courage and sagacity, held a brief council, and finally decided on the daring attempt. Malcolm on his part was not idle. Eight-and-twenty picked men he selected from the ranks, and brought to Randolph and his colleagues for approval, who examined them separately, told them what was needed, and in the joyous excitement which the very idea of the enterprise

created, received confirmation sufficient of their mettle and necessary coolness. His next care was to prepare his army so as to march through the different gates the moment they were flung open from within. This had all to be done after dark, lest their movements should attract the attention of the guard on the walls. Great, then, was the disappointment, when the night decided on for the attack, the moon, though young, shone so brightly as to prevent the attempt, and compel them to defer it. The darkness of the next, however, appeared to favor the enterprise, and, despite the fear the moon might break through the clouds ere the wall was gained, their ardor could be restrained no longer. The main army, divided into five strong bands, under experienced leaders, was marshalled silently and cautiously around the castle, to enter at once by every postern flung open for their admittance; and Randolph himself, with Sir Andrew Grey and Sir Aleck Fraser, placed themselves at the head of their eight-and-twenty picked men, and with beating hearts, but cool, collected daring, gave themselves up to the truth and guidance of Sir Amiot's page.

The rest is known. How they ascended they afterwards declared they could not tell, for on looking back by daylight, they could not trace their path, nor imagine how they had contrived to clamber up and round the crags; a false step, a loosened stone, a word spoken, must inevitably have betrayed them, and occasioned their entire destruction, simply by stones flung from above. The intensity of alarm even in their hardy breasts, when the voice of the sentinel was heard, declaring he saw them, and for the moment actually believed he did, may be perhaps imagined, but certainly not described. Well it was for them there had not been one wavering spirit, one uncertain heart amongst them, or the soldier's jest would have been speedily turned to earnest, and that moment their last.

Great indeed was the triumph of this important conquest; but there was no more pride and exultation in the gallant men through whose immediate agency it had been accomplished than in their comrades; they felt they had but done what every other Scotsman would have done, and that they had been chosen was more the work of chance than their own merits. Their only anxiety was for the approving look of their sovereign, the joy it would be to tell him another strong castle was at his feet; and therefore, when Lord Randolph publicly

asked them what reward he could bestow on them over and above their fellows, the unanimous shout arose for permission to accompany those who bore the tidings to the king.

"Be it so, then, gallant hearts!" exclaimed Randolph, frankly and joyously. "Sunset shall see ye at Dumbarton, and our noble king shall receive the Lady Agnes in life and freedom, and tidings of Edinburgh's downfall at the same time. Will you, gallant Amiot, accompany Grey and Fraser once more to the king, or will ye rest with me? an ye prefer the first, by St. Andrew, it is but your due; for without thy sagacity in tracking these marauding villains to their haunt, the Lady Agnes might still have been in captivity, and the king wasting his strength and hazarding his precious life in inglorious border warfare. Thou wert the paladin to risk life and lose liberty for this fair lady, and it is but right thou shouldst conduct her in all honor to the king."

"Yes, do thou go with me, gentle Amiot," interposed Agnes herself, who had, unobserved, neared the martial throng, and now clung to the knight's arm; "do thou take me to King Robert, and I will tell him how kind and good thou hast been to his poor Agnes, and he will give thee the love I cannot; and thou wilt lead me to the valleys and mountains I love, and pluck me fresh flowers and weave me bright garlands—wilt thou not? yes, yes. Go thou with me."

Her voice thrilled upon those rude hearts around till they absolutely melted before it, and men, a moment before alive but to the dream of glory and triumph, and all the sterner themes of war, felt a strange quivering of eye and lip, and turned away lest weakness should be betrayed. Sir Amiot's impulse, even at that moment, was to fold that fragile being to his yearning heart, and vow protection and kindness not alone for that brief journey, but forever and forever; for if *his* might not be that right, oh, whose might it be? but he could not claim it then—and there he might not prove the claim.

Preparations for departure were speedily arranged. With a concise narrative of the enterprise, Lord Randolph expressed the wish that the king would himself march to occupy Edinburgh, as, from its position, its great strength, its command of the sea, he deemed it well adapted for the capital of his kingdom, far better suited for that purpose than Perth, which,

lying more at the entrance of the highlands, appeared to confine his dominions to the north, and left the south to the mercy of its feudal lords. Sir Amiot, Fraser, and Grey gladly accepted the charge of these suggestions, and, armed with all proper directions, set off on their route.

It was a joyous journey. Nature seemed doubly smiling to the gaze of the free—for no nations are more alive to her changeful aspect than are mountaineers; and it appeared as if their many wanderings in the bosom of their country, the many times they had found shelter and protection and concealment in her vast solitudes and frowning mountains and hidden dells had endeared her yet more to their hearts, and excited yet more intense rejoicing in her freedom, in the widely different aspect she presented now to that of five brief years before. They passed through valleys, smiling in fertility and peace, undisturbed by the foot of the spoiler; they traversed villages, whose every inmate came forth to their cottage doors to cry God's blessing on them for their bravery and patriotism; they saw towns, whose mechanics and citizens were peacefully pursuing their several occupations, undisturbed by even the dream of slavery and spoil. They remarked these things, and there was not a heart in that gallant band which did not throb higher in honest exultation that, under a gracious Providence, their arms had done this—their country owed her freedom to her sons, and to none other.

It was a mournful satisfaction to witness the afflicted Agnes during this journey. She had chosen to ride, instead of using the litter Sir Amiot wished her to accept, and Malcolm was ever at her bridle-rein, quitting it but to start aside or gallop forwards to bring her some choice flower his quick eye perceived. He controlled his wandering propensities evidently to devote himself to her—a subject of some marvel to his comrades. Sir Amiot, too, rode beside her; quitting the gay converse of his colleagues, who rode ahead, and often besought him to join them, to tend and, when her rambling fancy would permit, talk with her. Her beautiful eye continually wandered round, lit up with glee, save when its gaze fixed itself on the azure heaven, and then the absorbing intensity of love which it betrayed, breathed that the fancy she could see the lost object of that love smiling upon her was again her own, and then words would escape her as if wholly unconscious of all outward

objects save *his* presence, and then the carol of some wild song expressed the imaginings of her soul in words. Half the journey she performed on horseback, but then bodily energy failed, and she was glad to recline in the litter Sir Amiot's care had provided, on condition, she said, its curtains should be wide apart, that she might look upon beautiful nature, and feel that she was free, that her own spirit love might commune with her still.

There had been already excitement at Dumbarton Castle that day, for Lord Douglas had unexpectedly arrived with news of the final reduction of all Roxburgh, and the borders in its vicinity; and though he had no intention of as yet leaving the important province in the hands of his subalterns, he could not resist the impulse of paying his sovereign a flying visit, and receiving fresh spirit and hope from the bright eyes of the Lady Isoline.

King Robert was in high spirits; the sight of his favorite officer, and the news he brought, banishing for the time his anxiety on account of Agnes, and unusual revelry and mirth rung round the festive board spread for the sunset meal. Determined not to evince the faintest sign of what in reality was passing or rather lay passive in her heart, Isoline's spirit outwardly appeared touched by the reigning gayety of the hour, and Douglas found himself entranced as usual. Hope was warm within him, and his spirits were exulting beneath its influence; he revelled in her surpassing grace and beauty, sufficiently content with present enjoyment not to hazard words of love, which he well knew would occasion her to be as cold and reserved as she was now all life and brilliance. King Robert looked on them both and rejoiced, imagining his earnest wishes growing nearer and nearer completion. Isoline could not look thus, speak thus, had she any painful affection dwelling in her heart, and if there were none, Douglas must succeed.

The last gleam of daylight had disappeared, and the huge torches of pine shed their bright ruddy light on the large hall, but there was no cessation, no pause in the lively converse and gay jests passing round; the meal seemed prolonged, that the sociality it engendered might not be disturbed, when loudly and shrilly a trumpet sounded without the walls, followed by eager tramp and loud shouts of greeting from within.

"Ha! fresh tidings—that is Randolph's bugle blast!" ex-

claimed the king, starting up from his seat of state. "Quick, marshal in his messengers, they bring us pleasant news, or he would not send them. By St. Andrew, 'tis something more than common—listen to those shouts!"

And even as he spoke, "Victory—Randolph—Edinburgh is free!" came loudly borne towards the castle, as if the very breeze, envious of the tongues of men, first bore it to the ears of the sovereign. The words acted like electricity.

Douglas even forgot Isoline, and sprung up; a dozen other of the lords followed his example, and rushed tumultuously from the hall. But what was there in those simple words to bid the heart of Isoline thus bound up, and flush and pale her cheek alternately? She had been told Sir Amiot was a prisoner—a prisoner, aye, in his eagerness to obtain the freedom of Agnes; that he had madly, imprudently hazarded, not only liberty, but life, in his pursuit of her captors. To others this might seem but chivalry, carried on somewhat rashly; they had not seen his emotion when told of her capture; Isoline had, and that subsequent devotion was but the natural consequence of such feeling. What did it mean? how might she answer, and yet feel his imprisonment, his danger, were matters of interest to her? But she did feel them; aye, despite her strivings for stoicism, her belief he could be nothing to her, felt nothing for her, there was no little suffering upon her heart, when fancy chose to picture all that might befall him in the hands of his enemies. Yet this she had successfully concealed; she had been bright and brilliant when every nerve was aching; but now those words, "Edinburgh is free!" and if so, *he* must be liberated, well-nigh banished that extraordinary self-control, and threatened her heart's betrayal. She felt her hands convulsively close, she could not have prevented it. She felt the life-blood leave her cheek and flow back to its fountain in her heart; a moment, and it rushed through every vein, burning in her cheek, her lip, with indignation at herself. He stood before her, and his hand clasped that of Agnes; his plumed helmet was in his hand, but there was a smile on his lip, a flash in his bright eye, visible through the half mask, which told of satisfaction apart from her. There were many new forms within the hall. Sir Andrew Grey, with the torn banner of England, Fraser, with the pennon of St. George, which his own hand had plucked from the outer turret, and the tall,

athletic forms of those gallant men who had been their companions in their daring deed; but Isoline saw them through a strange mist, in which only two objects were clear. Agnes clung to Sir Amiot's arm, evidently anxious to spring forward to the king, but slightly and tenderly restrained by him. He was bending down his head to hers, and seeming to whisper some gentle words, which had the effect of detaining her for a few minutes by his side.

"Free—conquered—ours!" were the first words distinctly intelligible to Isoline in the voice of her sovereign. "My noble, gallant Randolph, well hath he atoned for boyhood's errors! But, tell me, ere I hear more of this right glorious deed—the Lady Agnes, hath he found her scathless, uninjured? Is she free?"

"Aye, most gracious sovereign, and is here!" exclaimed Sir Amiot, joyfully, and withdrawing his arm at the same moment from the slender form he supported. Agnes bounded forward with that cry of glee so grateful to the sovereign's ear, and clasped his neck, clinging to his bosom as a child.

"Free—free! yes, I am free! Oh, they kept me in stone walls, and far, far away from my own kind Robert; and I could not even seek flowers and listen to the birds, and there came dark thoughts upon me and such sharp pain, but they have all gone now. He came and rescued me, that gentle knight—and thou must love him for me, Robert; thou knowest poor Agnes cannot, she has no love now save for thee! Wilt thou not reward him? he has been so kind!"

King Robert gazed upon her, so beautiful, so innocent in her affliction, and even at that moment of rejoicing in her unexpected freedom, and triumph in his nephew's conquest, there came the memory of his brother on his soul, flinging its darkness on his lip and brow. What might not that lovely being have been had he lived? what would have been his brother's bliss, had he been still in life? Deep, pure as was Robert's joy in this glorious freedom of his country, he knew, he felt it would have been exceeded by the joy of Nigel. How, amid such thoughts, could he think that beloved one was happier in heaven? He could not forget his horrible fate while Agnes yet lived, by her affliction to recall it so vividly; and in that moment of suddenly awakened memory the patriot, the warrior, the sovereign felt as if all was as naught, all could be

sacrificed, to fold that brother in life, in beauty, to his yearning heart.

He bent his lordly head upon that of Agnes, and without uttering a syllable covered her pale brow with kisses, but there needed not words; his warriors read that sudden change of countenance, the form of Nigel seemed to float before them all, and for a brief minute there was a sudden hush of eager tongues, an involuntary pause.

"To the board, to the board, my gallant hearts!" exclaimed the king, conquering that moment of emotion, as Agnes, released from his embrace, seated herself as usual on a low settle at his side, content to look on and hear him. "Ye have ridden long and well to bear us thus speedily these right glorious tidings. Room there, for our faithful comrades, well worthy to feast with their king. Welcome, welcome, one and all! Fill high every cup—to Randolph and his thirty!"

Loudly, enthusiastically the words were echoed again and yet again, and well it was perhaps for Isoline, the confusion which for a few minutes ensued enabling her, ere room was found for the new arrivals and order restored, to regain at least the semblance of composure.

Sir Amiot's eye had sought her amid the group of females scattered round the monarch's table. There was an unusual expression of hilarity in those of his features which were visible, and in his whole manner, and he had made a hasty advance towards Isoline as Agnes sprung from him to the king, as if claiming her sympathy in the liberation of her friend; then, from some rising recollection, he suddenly checked himself, the bright flash faded from his eye, and he merely bowed lowly in the respectful salutation her rank demanded. The bow was acknowledged coldly, it seemed to him reservedly, if not with unusual assumption of dignity, and the knight, chilled and saddened, took the place assigned him, and sought to join in the animated converse passing round him. Douglas had resumed his place by the side of the Lady Isoline, and she, as if resolved to prove her mastery over herself as well as over every one else, and determined to brave even his misconstruction rather than betray a single wandering thought, urged him on to give his opinion, his admiration of Randolph's gallant deed, entering herself into every martial detail, with that spirit, that animation which marked her connection with the glorious line

of Bruce, and rendered her perhaps yet dearer to her kinsmen. It was a gay and spirit-stirring scene, that old hall, that joyous night, for the enthusiasm of every heart was stamped on every brow, and breathed in every word. There was much for King Robert to hear, much he bade them repeat again and yet again, and when every particular of that daring exploit was told, applause swelled so long and loud, the arched roof echoed with the sound.

"Aye, to Edinburgh we will go," were the monarch's parting words that night. "Won by a patriot band, it shall henceforth be the capital of a patriot land, the dwelling of patriot kings. To Randolph we will go, my fellow-soldiers, ourselves to give him the meed of glory he so well deserves. One cup to Scotland's glory, and then to the rest ye so well need." The pledge passed round, the king departed, followed by one simultaneous cheer, that in truth wrung on his bold heart with a mighty sound, for it told of a kingdom's love.

CHAPTER V.

A VERY few months after the capture of Edinburgh Castle sufficed to give the whole town an aspect of bustle and activity peculiarly grateful to its inhabitants, so long depressed and groaning 'neath the consciousness that as long as their proud citadel were in English hands, however they might share the privileges, the immunities of other citizens granted by King Robert, still they were not free. They had heard of castles falling, of even countrymen and peasants rising in arms, and had felt yet more keenly the desire and the impossibility of laying their castle, even as others, at the feet of the king. That was now accomplished; the proud banner of Scotland waved in majestic folds from the keep, Scottish soldiers crowded the walls, Scottish nobles frequented the city, and lastly, but more precious yet to Scottish hearts, their patriot king had fixed his resting there, and with imposing pomp and ceremony, at which every civil and military authority of the city officiated, proclaimed that fair town the capital of Scotland, the seat of royalty, the centre of all of art or science that might fling the lustre of

her name to other lands, and shed increase of glory on her sons and there were not wanting those, amid the thronging thousands that day congregated, to prophesy the future fame of that goodly town; that she would send forth from her walls not warriors alone, but men armed with the might of genius, the steady rays of philosophy, of learning; that, proclaimed thus the capital of a land *made* free, she would preserve her freedom through distant ages, and foster in her bosom all of worth and art and genius, that can exist but midst the free. King Robert permitted not that enthusiasm to cool. Disorders that had crept in during the English bondage were rectified; the public schools were rearranged on a sure footing; encouragement afforded to artists of every grade, and all the blessings of peace and security took the place of outrage and of gloom. A new spirit dawned upon the town, lighting up its every nook and lowliest home with the beams of that sun which shines but for the free!

For a brief period the king of Scotland gave his undivided attention to the internal comfort and strength of his kingdom and people; made repeated excursions from Edinburgh to other towns and districts; arranged aught that might be disorderly, heightened all that was flourishing. Happiness and peace waited on his steps, and left their trace behind them. He saw that all of Scotland in his possession was secure; that the castles and fortresses he had permitted to stand, as guardians of the country, were well seneschalled and garrisoned; and thus, on his return to Edinburgh, he had leisure to form his plans for another expedition against England, which by internal conflicts was well-nigh torn asunder.

"Any service needed along the coast of Ireland, Sir Knight of the Branch?" said Lord Edward Bruce, jocosely, meeting Sir Amiot in one of the antechambers of the castle, early in the June of the same year. "Know you I am going to change my services from a general's to an admiral's, and would ask your sombre worship to accompany me, did I imagine the request likely to be of any weight. Think you, your fair charge—for I must deem her fair, as naught but a woman could hold a young knight so steadfast to his oath—think you, I say, there is a chance of finding her on some desert rock of the ocean, or wild tower on the Irish coast? if so, give me charge concerning her."

"I thank your lordship for the kindly offer, but I have somewhat more hope for the fulfilment of my vow in accompanying King Robert to England; were it other, I would gladly try my fortune on the seas. But for what go ye to Ireland? whither and for what purpose seek you the treacherous deep? Methought it were a service scarce active enough for Lord Edward Bruce."

"Why no, perchance not, were it not a pleasant change; and Robert—I pray his grace's pardon—has a right to demand of me what he pleases. I would lose my right hand in his service, and fight with my left forever after, if it would pleasure him; king as he is, successful, more gloriously triumphant, there is not a spark of presumption about him; he is all a brother still. For what purpose seek I the coast of Ireland dost ask? why, to levy tribute—gold for King Robert instead of King Edward—and I shall succeed, rest you assured."

"No doubt of it," answered Sir Amiot, laughing; "Lord Edward Bruce, like his royal brother, has but to appear, and that which he wishes is done; nay, it is no chivalric courtesy, my lord, thou knowest 'tis truth. For this English expedition, hast heard more concerning it—are the king's plans determined?"

"I believe yes, or very nearly so, depending on the information expected by an express from England. He marches as soon after that information as possible. Our poor afflicted Agnes has so conjured him not to leave her behind again that, somewhat unwisely, I think, he has promised compliance. On a predatory expedition like this, there is much risk and little convenience for females."

"For females! the Lady Agnes will not go there alone?" Sir Amiot's heart throbbed as he spoke.

"No; that madcap Isoline has not ceased tormenting to go too, declaring her desire to visit England was too ungovernable to be resisted. His grace has half consented, for the sake of Agnes, and partly to further his darling scheme."

"And what is this darling scheme?"

"Now, art thou really so wrapt in thine own melancholy musings as not to know, nay, to *see*, for it is clear as crystal? Does not Douglas go with you, and if Isoline still shunned him, as there was a time when we fancied she did, would she be so earnest in desiring to accompany the king? no, no; depend on

it, she is beginning to be touched by his devotion, and wishes to watch his conduct in the field with her own eye, at least so King Robert argues, and it sounds well."

"And it is King Robert's darling wish to bring about this union?" demanded Sir Amiot, with a huskiness of tone he endeavored to conceal.

"Darling wish! why he would, I think, fight for his kingdom over again to bring it about, and make that little independent Isoline love Douglas as Douglas loves, and, what is more, deserves to be loved."

"And thinkest thou this will be? Does the Lady Isoline love—does she reciprocate his devotion?"

"Not a doubt of it; not a doubt but that it will be. Isoline was not at all likely to let him see his triumph too soon; she would rather keep him at bay—try him by coldness and pride, and all that sort of thing. But what was it for? simply to make her victory more complete, and use all her powers ere she submitted them to him. I am not overwise in reading woman's heart, but that's all clear enough."

"You think, then, she loves him now?"

"Undoubtedly I do. How could she remain untouched by such constant devotion as he has shown? and this desire to accompany King Robert to England confirms it."

"Truly, yes," replied Sir Amiot, with an effort, that to any other but Lord Edward Bruce must have been observable; then hastily changing the conversation, he said:

"Was there not some talk of an expedition to the Isle of Man? Does your lordship take it into your cruise, or will his grace make the attack?"

"If this expedition to England be attended with his usual success, the galleys will, in all probability, await him off the coast of Cumberland, and he will set sail thence with part of his army, leaving the rest to march leisurely to Scotland. But a word in your ear, Sir Amiot; Dundee and Rutherglen shall acknowledge Robert ere he return. I have set my heart on their reduction, and trust me for the deed."

"And Stirling?"

"All in good time. There shall remain no fortress in Scotland garrisoned by English, while Edward Bruce can wield a sword. Ha! Sir Henry Seaton; what news—whither go ye all, my lords?" he continued, as several noblemen entered the ante-room.

"To the king," was the reply. "The express from England has arrived, bringing important news. Gaveston is murdered."

"Ha! by my faith, important indeed. Poor wretch! so much for favoritism. Come, Amiot, we'll to the king also;" and putting his arm into the knight's, they followed the lords into the presence of the king.

The state of England was indeed startling. Torn by internal divisions, broken into two parties, one of which, consisting simply of Edward and his ill-fated favorite, struggled vainly against the overwhelming power of all the English aristocracy, up in arms to wash out the insolence and audacity of the upstart minion in his blood, the kingdom presented almost as fair a field for conquest as Scotland had done to the rapacious Edward of former years. Edward the Second had been compelled to fly northward before the arms of Lancaster, carrying his favorite with him, leaving him in the fortress of Scarborough, he himself marching to York, in the hope of raising forces sufficient to overawe Lancaster and his confederates. Before, however, this could be accomplished, Pembroke had besieged Scarborough, the slender garrison of which compelled Gaveston to surrender. He did so, however, on conditions, which, had they been adhered to, might have saved him from his horrible fate. Pembroke artfully eluded them, conducting him to the castle of Dedington, near Banbury; he there left him under but a slender guard, and departed on pretence of important business, but in all probability to counsel with the Earl of Warwick on measures afterwards adopted. Warwick, confident of success from Pembroke's intelligence, attacked the castle. The garrison made no resistance, but delivered up Gaveston into the hands of his enemies, who conducted him with all speed to Warwick Castle, and there Lancaster, Hereford, and Arundel, instantly repaired. Hatred has little regard to law, and consequently, without any reference to civil trial or military capitulation, the head of the favorite was struck off by the common executioner, without mercy or delay.

Incensed beyond all measure at this outrage to his favorite, vowing vengeance unlimited against its perpetrators, Edward was making preparations for war all over England, and no time therefore could be more favorable for King Robert's plans. The Scottish king had listened attentively and silently to this

intelligence, expressing some pity both for Gaveston and Edward. His acute mind saw at once the favorable opportunity for further conquests.

His plans were discussed freely and fully, and speedily arranged. Orders were given to collect and marshal his soldiers, to bring them under their several leaders towards the borders, there to unite into one compact close body, ready to penetrate in a southwesterly direction towards Chester, to which place King Robert had resolved, despite of all opposition, to make his way.

"And now this weighty business accomplished," he said, perceiving some of the lords about to depart, "I would fain know if aught has been heard of Sir Alan Comyn in these English proceedings. Has that unhappy youth fallen a victim to favoritism, even as the presumptuous Gaveston? Can any one tell—is there any mention of his name?"

"Some speak of him as being still with Edward, his only surviving prop and consolation—the sweet-voiced traitor; and others say he shared Gaveston's fate; if so, the English have but taken justice out of our hands, and so God speed them."

"Peace, Seaton, peace," returned the king, somewhat sternly; "speak not so wrathfully of that poor misguided boy. The saints forefend that such should be his miserable fate; while he lives I may hope yet to clear this mystery."

"Mystery, what mystery?" fiercely interrupted Edward Bruce. "Is there aught of mystery in his public devotion to his country's bitterest foe? in the fact that the same lip which swore with such pretended emotion loyalty to Bruce, should forswear itself in similar vows to Edward? Mystery, that the craven should prefer riches, honor, security, in an English court, to danger, poverty, privation, in the camp of Bruce? Pshaw! there is little of mystery here."

"Edward, I tell you there is much, much. I will never believe that this came to pass freely and fairly; that boy had too much of his mother's spirit in him to draw back thus, and desert a cause he so nobly embraced."

"Embraced in his earliest youth, my gracious liege," rejoined Lennox. "Your highness's remembrance of that son of a rebellious house does indeed honor to thine heart, but trust me, will find no response in his youthful enthusiasm. The presence and counsels of his exalted mother might well occasion the bold

loyalty he at first displayed; but parted from that mother and that cause, her voice hushed, nay, perhaps her very existence hidden from him, in the very midst of a court noted for licentiousness and pleasure, made the pet and plaything of a luxurious monarch, is there mystery or marvel in this change? My liege, dismiss this misguided scion of the Comyn from your kindly thought; he is not worthy of the regret, the affection thus bestowed on him."

"Lennox, Lennox," answered the king, urgently, though mildly, "I doubt not the wisdom or experience of your maturer judgment, I would not do it wrong; yet, my friend, were this boy other than a Comyn, thinkest thou, thou wouldst thus quarrel with my feelings, my doubt of this strange tale? Answer me frankly: were Alan other than a Comyn, would not thy judgment be other than it is?"

"In sober truth, my liege, it would; but when we have had such bloody proofs of the Comyn's undying hatred to the Bruce, and treachery to Scotland—hatred from all who bear that name, from the serf to the lord, inciting not mere open warfare, but midnight assassination, or poisoned meal—is it well, is it wise, to except one to the diabolical infamy of the line, because, before he mingled with them, he had seen and heard but loyalty, and fancied himself loyal? It is better, perchance, he is the traitor they proclaim him; it had been a bitter pang to him to feel himself alone of that base line. And by my knightly faith, I fear, even in this camp, in the very face of seeming loyalty and patriotism, he would have met mistrusters; that name, that blackened name, how could its bearer pass unquestioned?"

A low deep hum of assent passed through the lordly crowd at these words, betraying but too clearly how completely the sentiments of the aged nobleman were echoed by his fellows. Sir Amiot alone neither spoke nor moved. He was standing close beside, rather behind, the sovereign's chair, and his tall form partly shadowed by the drapery of a curtain; he had been the most eagerly animated of all who discussed the expedition to England, smoothing every difficulty advanced by others. None knew the effort it was to speak thus, or even if they had, none could have discovered its cause, little dreaming there could have been any thing in Lord Edward Bruce's blunt conference, to which alone the effort might be traced.

The sudden start occasioned by the king's first words concerning Sir Alan Comyn was controlled so speedily and successfully, it escaped observation, and he resumed the post he was about leaving; glancing first at the sovereign and then on his nobles, and once or twice with difficulty restraining speech, he stood proudly and yet more proudly erect; but his fellow-nobles were all too much engrossed in their own speculations to notice him.

The king had listened to the assenting voice with a painful expression of sadness on his noble features, then rousing himself, said, cheerfully: "Not with us, my good lords, not with us. I had no shadow of doubt as to the truth, the loyalty that ill-fated boy expressed; I should have honored, trusted in him, aye, in the very midst of the dark treason of his line. Even now, did he return to me, acknowledge his error, swear renewed fidelity, I would, for his mother's sake, forgive and believe him. Still there is mystery, I say again; nay, there are times I believe his tyrant father, carried on by passion, did wreak his murderous vengeance on his son, and to disguise or conceal the horrible deed, has forged this tale. Laugh an ye will, my lords, at your monarch's incredulity, but till that boy be brought before me, and I see his own proper person, hear from his own lips this tale, I'll not believe it."

"Surely it were better for us to learn a lesson of your grace's noble charity, than laugh at it," unexpectedly interposed Sir Amiot, speaking very slowly, as if under some restraint; "for my own part, my liege, I would fain think with thee."

"Because you know little of that false line from which the stripling springs, my good friend," answered Edward Bruce. "Did you know them as we do, you would think as we do, and marvel less at the benevolence and kindness with which his highness speaks, for that is natural, than at the want of wisdom such credulity implies. However he might trust that boy again, I should hold it my duty to prevent it, if by no other way, by the sharp steel."

"And I, and I, and I," responded many voices.

"Methought the Countess of Buchan bore such a name for loyalty and patriotism, her son might be judged more kindly," continued Sir Amiot, still in that same guarded tone. "There are brave tales told of her."

"And rumor for once speaks truth, and less than truth," re-

plied Lord Edward, frankly; "she is a great, a good, a glorious woman! I would lose my left hand to-morrow, to gain her freedom. Had her son been still under her control, he would never have been the thing he is, nor I have doubted him, although his name be Comyn."

"But surely, my lord, that influence could have been of little worth so soon to pass away. Bethink thee, a mother hath great power, and he was not, I have heard, so young when they were parted."

"Right, Amiot, right!" exclaimed the king, as he rose to depart. "Beshrew me, thou hast spoken wisely, and somewhat more kindly of a stranger than these good knights, who knew and seemed to love him. Trust me, that mother's power will one day be proved. He is more a Duff than a Comyn, I'll be sworn, and if he be in Edward's court, 'tis force not love that keeps him."

"Every man to his own thoughts, my royal brother," rejoined Edward Bruce, as the king courteously quitted the chamber; "thine are perchance those of a forgiving, mine of an avenging warrior. There was never yet a Comyn who was not enemy to the Bruce, whose blood showed not the same black poisonous stream, however mingled with a purer—and root and branch I'll sweep them from the earth."

He clenched his hand threateningly, and the dark scowl of vengeance gathered on his brow. There were many to join him in hatred of this race, in vowing their extermination. Others speculated a little longer on the real situation and politics of the young heir of Buchan, and others again eagerly returned to the exciting thoughts of an expedition into England, and so the assembly dispersed.

It was very late before Sir Amiot had concluded some military arrangements with his colleagues, and found himself quietly at his quarters. His couch was ready, his page in attendance, but there seemed no inclination on his part to avail himself of these comforts; he flung himself down on the first seat that presented itself, and covered his face with his hands. Malcolm looked at him with great surprise and some alarm; at length, "To England, my noble master; think, at length we march to England," he said, half hesitatingly, half joyously. "And the Lady Agnes goes with us to make our triumph the more complete."

"Triumph, what triumph?" demanded his master, suddenly looking up, but speaking in a tone so hollow, it presented a strange contrast to the page's joy.

"Nay, now, my lord, something must in truth have gone wrong for you to ask me this. Will it be no triumph when her freedom is won, no triumph when this disguise may be cast off, and you stand forth your own noble self?"

"Malcolm, Malcolm, cease, in mercy!" passionately escaped Sir Amiot, and he strode up and down the room as one wrung almost to phrensy. "I, too, once believed this would be a triumph, a glorious triumph; but now, now let me but gain her freedom, and lie down and die!"

"My lord—Sir Amiot!" exclaimed the page, and he gently took his master's burning hand. "Oh, you are ill, you must be, or you would not speak thus—gain her freedom and *die!* How would she bear this, she to whom thou art all in all?"

"She believes me dead; why undeceive her?" he answered, though he was evidently softened, for he sunk back into his seat and the hand his page held trembled with emotion; "why undeceive her, when it will be but to see me scorned and shunned as a traitor, leagued with traitors? They have told me this, their own lips have sworn, root and branch, to exterminate the traitor line, and why, why should I escape? No, no, better die than bear this—she, she shall live to be happy. They have told her I am dead, and she has mourned for me as dead—she will now weep no more."

"But if they have told her the lie that rumor hath conveyed even here, the black, slanderous lie?"

"Malcolm, she'll not believe it—no; did an angel swear it. No, she would not wrong me thus!" exclaimed Sir Amiot, again starting up. "She would believe me dead, but not that black lie; not that even force hath made me villain. No, no, she'll not believe it!"

"She would not, would not, my noble master—in truth, she would not; and trust me, none else will, when she proclaims thee hers. When men remember years of fidelity, of courage tried in many a well-fought field, will they dare repeat these slanders? No, no, they judge thus because they know naught of him whom they condemn. Gain but her freedom, and show thyself the noble being that thou art, that thou hast ever been."

"I would I had thy hopeful heart, my faithful Malcolm,"

replied his master, pausing in his hasty walk, and laying his hand caressingly on his young follower's shoulder; "but hadst thou heard all that I have, thou, too, wouldst feel that scarce could be. Well, well, let it be; my path lies onward, my vow is not yet fulfilled, and till it is, my heart must not fail me, even though 'tis crushed and bruised!"

"Do not speak so, my lord; think, only think we march to that land, to that very city where the foe holds her prisoner; her freedom must be, shall be gained."

Sir Amiot shook his head. "We have marched to that city before, my good boy, and marched from it and left her there; and hope was stronger then than it is now. Malcolm, my soul is deadened, hope hath no voice within."

"It is silent, that reality may be more joyous yet; oh, trust me, thy vow shall soon be accomplished, thy name be known, honored, shouted aloud as the friend, not the foe of the Bruce, and then," he looked archly in Sir Amiot's face, "the Lady Isoline, my lord—"

"Will be the bride of Douglas!" and Sir Amiot's voice grew stern with emotion. "Malcolm, speak not of her. King Robert gives his niece to Douglas, and she will be his bride."

"Douglas—the bride of Douglas," and the boy laughed long and lightly, though not disrespectfully; "an that is all thou fearest, good my lord, shake off the fancy as thou wouldst the nightmare of thy sleep. The bride of Douglas, that Lady Isoline will never be!"

"And wherefore not?" demanded Sir Amiot, roused despite of himself.

"Simply because Lady Isoline will never marry, even to please King Robert, the man she loves not."

"And how knowest thou that she loves not Douglas?"

"How? never mind, my lord, but trust my eyes better than thine own. And now surely, your lordship will to rest; already I see the first gleam of morning."

Sir Amiot followed his advice, soothed and roused from his despondency, even to his own wonderment, by his page's eager words. It is strange how brightly and beautifully hope will return to the human breast, even after she has seemed crushed and forever. The knight would in truth have found it difficult to define wherefore his feelings had undergone so complete a

change in so short an interval; why the buoyant hopefulness of the young Malcolm should so extend itself to him, when in truth it had but words, glowing words, no foundation on which to rest. Still he was young, though his peculiar situation had given him the sadness and experience of age, and Nature will sometimes speak when her voice has appeared hushed; and she spoke now, when Hope relit her torch—for it is youth, elastic, springing youth, and youth alone, to whom Hope is a guardian angel, a reviving spirit, unknown to maturer years. The deep wound the nobles so unconsciously had inflicted had turned his thoughts from other painful subjects, and the soothing of the first seemed to shed balm upon the last, though, alas! only for that one night; the next morning showing him Douglas ever at the Lady Isoline's bridle-rein but too vividly recalled the words of Lord Edward Bruce, and dashed his returning spirit with deeper gloom.

"Does the Lady Isoline know *whose* liberty you seek, my lord?" the page asked him, carelessly, on one of their daily marches southward.

"How can you ask? of course, no. My vow forbids, for if I breathe her name, I tell my own," was the reply. To which the page rejoined—

"Would that she did, my lord, for she is proud, and if she thinks—"

"Thinks what?" demanded his master, but the page had spurred off to finish his soliloquy elsewhere.

The movements of King Robert's army were, as usual, rapid and successful. Pouring down on the north of England from the Cheviot Hills, the country soon displayed the marks of his progress. Houses, castles, villages fell before the sweeping arms of the avengers, for so the soldiers now looked upon themselves, and gloried in the title.

Divided into two stout bands, the first, under command of the renowned Douglas and Randolph, made such rapid and triumphant way, that the second band, following more leisurely, appeared more like the quiet progress of a conqueror through an humbled soil, than the rear-guard of an advancing foe. In this band was the king, and with him his niece, the Lady Isoline, whose high spirit gloried in the triumphs that she witnessed, to the utter exclusion of all personal thought of danger. Her safety, however, was but little endangered, for the English

made no resistance, flying before the advancing armies, as if all dream of strife and war with such a foe were worse than futile. But Isoline was still a woman, though a daring one, and many a time did her benevolence, her tender thought for the sorrowing and injured, soften the horrors of their fate, and bind them in chains of amity and kindness to their conquerors, inclining them of their own accord to terms of peace and friendship. She hovered, like a ministering angel, amidst the iron warriors composing her uncle's troops excited and exciting, giving vent to all the natural resolution of her character; looking on the skilful manœuvre, the sagacious march with an eye, clear, intelligent as any of those whose trade was war; a mind pleased and interested, yet never losing one atom of the delicacy, the refinement, the dignity, the gentleness of her sex, never intruding a remark which might be deemed unwomanly. She was in truth a lovely specimen of woman in the chivalric era; one uniting in herself every quality that could fascinate a soldier either in the battle-field or tented bower, and hold him there a willing prisoner to her power. Few, indeed, who gazed on her imagined how large a share of woman's peculiar feelings lay shrined in that little heart; that even now, while every word breathed energy, every glance spoke fire, or softened into sympathy with all who needed it, there were thoughts and pains within, which perchance had bowed some others of her sex even to the earth, or wrapt them up in selfish musing and unquiet gloom. If any dream of a mood too masculine entered an observer's soul, he had but too look on her with the afflicted Agnes, to mark how soothingly and fondly she would forget all else to tend and to caress her, and the dream would vanish quicker than it came.

There was a change too in the temperament of Agnes, which this expedition had made perceptible. The wild, wayward fancies of childhood which had characterized her wanderings in Scotland, now gave way much more often to a loftier mood; a spirit sometimes approaching inspiration, sometimes so nearly resembling perfect sanity, that it would rouse eager hopes in the breast of both her sovereign and Isoline, aye, and in another, too, who loved her none guessed how dearly; but his hopes were mingled with fears, for every time she appeared more than usually conscious, less engrossed with inward fancies, Sir Amiot seemed intuitively to perceive the frame grew weaker and more

fragile; and while he longed he dreaded to behold a return of mind.

Occupying a high station near the person of his king, Sir Amiot's opportunities of associating with Isoline were more frequent than satisfactory. She did not avoid, but she did not invite his attention and devotion as she had at first; and he, believing there was more truth in Lord Edward's words concerning her love for Douglas than he chose to own even to himself, and feeling too that he could have no claim upon her, that even if her heart were disengaged, how might he, a nameless adventurer, wrapt in mystery, hope for a place within it?—he, too, kept aloof, seeking, how vainly may be imagined, to keep his heart and thoughts fixed on the object he once hoped would alone engross them—the liberation, the happiness of one who, until he beheld Isoline, had reigned without a rival in his love. Through lingering years he had struggled on for Scotland, yet, coupled with his soul's desire for her freedom, was a yet dearer object, his daily thought, his nightly dream; when the darkness of despondency gathered thickly around him on the battle-field, that object sustained him still; and though, perchance, he cared but little for his life, that life was not his own, he had vowed it unto her, and that vow should be fulfilled. He looked to but one spot in the future—her liberation; the rest was all a blank, to be filled up he knew not, cared not how. Though not always had he thought thus; there had been a time when young ambition looked to that liberation as but the sunrise of glory, as the opening of a long vista of radiant gladness, in which fame, love, honor, all had had gleesome resting; but years had stolen on that boyhood's dream, with all the sickness of hope deferred, and though that object was still the life, the pivot of his being, his visioned future now ever ended with its attainment.

King Robert gained his daring purpose. The ancient city of Chester was not only reached, but, as if in reckless challenge of the English power, for a few weeks he encamped there, receiving deputations from the four northern counties, entreating peace, and, following the example of the Bishopric of Durham, whose capital city had been stormed in a night, offered the sum of two thousand marks for redemption from further attack, and solemnly entering into an engagement with the Bruce, which granted him the privilege of marching through their territories

whenever he wished to make war on England. This was too eligible an offer to be refused. The king accepted it, far more as a tacit acknowledgment of his power, than with any present idea of availing himself of it; and in consequence, when he had given his army sufficient rest, retraced his steps northward, with as little molestation as if he had been making a progress through his own kingdom. Encamping again at Hartlepool, he thence dispatched Douglas with half his army to Carlisle, in the hope of reducing that city to obedience, determining himself to attempt that of Berwick, which still resisted the Scottish arms. For this purpose he did not remain very long at Hartlepool, but departed, taking with him most of his army, leaving only a small but steady troop, under command of Sir Amiot, to follow more leisurely, with Isoline and Agnes, whom he left under that knight's especial care.

It was on the evening of the fourth day's march from Hartlepool that Sir Amiot found himself for the first time riding abreast with the Lady Isoline, at such a distance from his soldiers, who were surrounding the litter of Agnes, that they were comparatively alone. It was perhaps strange this had not occurred before, for the lady had certainly not appeared to avoid him, but it so happened that a group of young officers had generally joined Sir Amiot and his charge at the head of the cavalcade. This evening, however, Lady Isoline had expressed a wish to explore a wild picturesque path, leading down from the main road. Sir Amiot had accompanied her, and on returning to the line of march, about a mile further, they found themselves much ahead of their followers.

"And amidst all the castles, convents, towns, and cities that have acknowledged King Robert's power, can it be your object is still unattained, sir knight, or have you wearied of the hope, and wait till chance effect it?" Isoline inquired, after the conversation had continued for some time in an animated strain on King Robert's triumphant progress, and other chivalric topics.

"Wearied of my hope? no, lady, I had wearied of my life sooner," was his somewhat mournful answer. "It is indeed ever fading, but can never wholly depart. I did look to this expedition to bring it nearer; that in some castle in our way I might find the captive whom I seek. I hoped Edward's policy had not retained her so many years in the weary durance

in which his father's tyranny had placed her; but if she be still there—which now I say heaven grant she be—I still hope, for Berwick is our destination."

"Berwick! Have you certain intelligence, then, the captive you seek is there? Think you not it is more probable, an she be of the rank and power you describe, she shares the imprisonment of the Queen of Scotland and her train?"

"It may be," replied the knight, musingly; "perchance it is, and yet Edward must be indeed contrary to his father, an he grant her such honorable keeping. I speak in seeming mystery, lady; would, would it were not so, that in thy kindly ear I might pour forth a tale which, simple as in reality it is, mystery hath turned to marvel."

"I would there were no mystery, for thine own sake, sir knight," replied the lady, kindly. "Trust me, thou hast mine earnest wishes for its speedy dissolution."

"And blessing on thee, lady, for that kind tone!" answered Sir Amiot, passionately. "Oh, lady, I deemed my vow of easy keeping, that I should scarce wish more than liberty to fight under King Robert's banners, and thus obtain its fulfilment; but since I have known thee, oh, my heart hath throbbed and burned to cast aside this shrouding guise and tell thee I am free; that, spite of poverty, of a name, that when spoken may perchance fling down an eternal barrier between its bearer and the Bruce—despite of these, I am free, unshackled—free to offer unto thee the lowly homage thy nobleness demands—free to, to—"

"Nay, sir knight, I pray thee a truce to chivalry," said Isoline, at the same moment causing her palfrey to spring forward, to enable her to control a sudden emotion, she knew not whether of pleasure or of pain; "I wish companionship not homage now, Sir Amiot, and to a graver subject—what thinkest thou of the Lady Agnes? the change in her can scarce have passed thee unobserved?"

"It has not, lady; I see it with joy yet trembling, for I fear me the frame will scarce have strength to sustain the sudden weight of mind restored."

"Thinkest thou so, indeed? alas! how may we then desire its return. Her innocence, her childlike purity so endear her that I cannot think of losing her without a pang, though by herself death would be hailed with joy."

"Death—oh, speak it not; she must not, she shall not die yet!" fell from Sir Amiot's lips, in tones that at once deadened the sudden elasticity with which a moment before Isoline's spirit had leaped up. "She is a being so beautiful, so lovable in her affliction—oh! who is there can look on her and not love? and to me—oh, what is she not to me!"

He paused abruptly, conscious how contradictory and strange his words must seem; but it was too late, they were spoken, though he would have given worlds to recall them. He glanced on the face of Isoline, a grave inquiring look had usurped the place of the playfulness resting there before; he felt its expression one almost of contempt, and his spirit absolutely writhed beneath that self-inflicted pang. At that moment, perhaps fortunately for both, as neither seemed inclined to renew the conversation, an officer spurred on from the troop.

"There is mischief afoot, Sir Amiot!" he exclaimed. "Gave not King Robert positive orders that neither city, castle, nor convent should be injured, or even threatened in this northward march?"

"He did; who has dared disobey?" and Sir Amiot was once again the steady soldier, his whole attention given to his charge.

"I scarcely know, save that some of our men have observed a band of marauding borderers hovering about these districts, and overheard some intimation of an attack on the Convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, lying somewhere in this direction. There is smoke rising yonder, and methought sounds as of attack and wailing were borne towards us on the wind. Will it please you I should ride forward?"

"Halt a moment, Fitz-Ernest; my authority perchance will be needed. Will it please you, lady, to accept the escort of Sir Ronald St. Clair, and permit my riding forward? it were scarce safe for you to encounter this wild band, checked as they will be in their pillage, and yet I must see to the maintenance of the king's commands." The lady calmly signified her assent, and Sir Amiot, hastily informing his colleague of his intention, and entreating him to bring his fair charge leisurely forward to their night quarters, which lay in the direction of the convent, divided his band, and galloped forward with a hundred men. It was rapidly approaching dusk, but some faint sounds of

tumult proved an unerring guide, until smoke and flames marked the site of the village round the convent, which was situated on one of the Cheviot Hills. The suddenness of Sir Amiot's appearance, the strength and skill with which his strong-armed band bore down on the border plunderers, speedily forced them to give way, and compelled them at the sword's point to acknowledge and give instant obedience to the written mandate of the king. Leaving fifty of his men to endeavor to quench the flames and keep the peace, Sir Amiot rushed up the steep, informed by his prisoners below that their strongest band was there employed in the sacking of the convent. The oaken doors of the church had been broken down, and already was there a rude band employed in tearing the gold and silver ornaments from the shrines, with oaths and horrid laughter desecrating that solemn edifice, accustomed only to the voice of prayer. A moment sufficed for Sir Amiot to notice this, and also that, grouped in various attitudes, stood, knelt, and crouched the holy sisters around the altar, the abbess and one or two others alone standing erect in lofty and undaunted composure; the former boldly addressing the rude plunderers, and commanding them to desist, or dread the thunders of the Church.

"Hold your reverend tongue, good mother of wisdom, and let us to our work. We never molest unless we are molested, so best let us work in peace."

"In peace, sacrilegious villains, aye, in such peace as King Robert grants to all such thieves!" was the fierce and unexpected answer received, as, some on horseback, some on foot, their iron heels clattering fearfully on the stone pavement, Sir Amiot's loyal band rushed in. There was a brief, sharp struggle; but taken by surprise, conscious of their liability to the severity of King Robert's law, most of the plunderers fled in confusion, glad enough to escape the swords of their countrymen, or, what was perhaps worse to them, captivity. Some fled to the mountains, others to the village, and there shared the fate of their companions; but in a very brief interval all trace of their purpose was lost, save in the smoking ruins of the hamlet, the disordered state of the church, many of whose beautiful images lay shivered on the floor, and the still lingering terror of the nuns, which neither the example nor the expostulations of the abbess could in any degree assuage.

"Away, Sir Thomas Keith; take some of the men, and search well round the convent. I fear me, those irreverent ruffians will elude us yet, and do some further mischief. Place a strict watch around, and do you, Walter, draw off the remaining men · we do but terrify these holy ladies. I fear me ye have suffered much, reverend mother," continued the young knight, turning with respectful courtesy towards the altar, and doffing his helmet; "I pray you lay no blame to the score of good King Robert; this outrage is against his express commands, and will draw down his just vengeance on its perpetrators."

"Nay, we ask not vengeance," replied the venerable abbess; "it is enough your courage, young man, and that of your companions, under Him, whose instruments you are, has saved us from this evil; we have suffered merely the effects of terror, which will speedily be calmed. Retire, my daughters, each one to her cell, and pour forth your several thanksgivings, till the church be once more ready to receive our general praise; surely we need it, for the mercy has been signal. Sister, you are ill, overcome," she added, hastily, as a deep, heavy sigh, almost a sob, was heard to escape from a tall, dignified-looking female, closely veiled, and dressed in the black, shrouding robes of those inmates of the convent who were under its rules and discipline, though, from some unknown cause, had not taken the vows. The church was almost all in gloom, but the lamps burning on the altar gave the knight a full view of this shrouded figure, on whom his eyes had unconsciously been fixed, even while the abbess spoke. Perceiving that her agitation, from whatever cause it sprung, rather increased than diminished, compelling her to seek the support of a seat, Sir Amiot, with the kindly feeling peculiarly natural to him, flew to seek some water, and then it was the stranger raised her head, and finding herself almost alone with the abbess, murmured in tones that, though low, were absolutely thrilling in their richness—

"The voice of my country, and in such sweet tones! oh, holy mother, thy calm and gentle heart cannot know what they are to me—and the glance of that dark eye, though I could see no other feature, oh, what could it be, to bring back memory so vividly, till the dead seemed to rise again and live? Pity me, pray for me, holy mother; I knew not how weak my brain had grown."

"Alas! my daughter, thou hast borne so much, no marvel that even so slight a thing as the voice of thy country should unnerve thee now. Imprisoned so cruelly, imprisoned for so many years, tortured in mind through so many causes, oh, I am not so withered in brain and senseless in heart as not to feel how much need thou hast for our prayers; but our God is merciful, my sister, trust in Him still."

The lady bowed her head in resignation, and Sir Amiot returning at that instant, she accepted the courteously offered draught with a silent but expressive gesture of thanks, then rising, took the arm of one of the nuns, and slowly departed, leaving Sir Amiot with his eyes still riveted upon her, he knew not wherefore. He was aroused by the abbess again addressing him.

"We would fain offer you something more substantial than mere thanks, young knight," she said. "I fear those ravagers have done sad havoc among our poor people, yet perchance there are still farmers enow to give your companions good fare and lodging at our sole charge. We grieve that the rules of our order prevent our offering yourself and your brother knights the hospitality that inclination prompts; but a few yards below there, to the east of our convent gates, is a small fraternity of monks, who will gladly give ye all ye need."

Sir Amiot frankly accepted the hospitality so offered, adding, that he would draw on her kindness yet more, by beseeching a lodging in the convent for the ladies of whom he had the charge, as their residence elsewhere might almost be considered unsafe, from the borderers who had fled, and who were perhaps likely to attempt some annoyance from their having been so thwarted in their intended outrage. The abbess expressed pleasure in having it in her power to afford this protection, and the knight departed to dispatch a speedy messenger to Sir Ronald St. Clair, telling him all that had chanced, and desiring him to conduct his fair charge without delay to the convent, which, only five miles from their intended quarters, presented a secure and comfortable asylum, well worth the additional fatigue. The rank and name of the Lady Isoline, and also all that was absolutely necessary to be imparted concerning the peculiar situation of the Lady Agnes Bruce—for she now only bore her husband's name—were told to the abbess, and Sir Amiot sending forward his brothers-in-arms to the small mon-

astery pointed out, himself mounted his horse and rode back to meet his charge.

"Is my sister well enough to join us in the refectory, or will she take her meal alone?" inquired the abbess, entering the chamber of the lady before mentioned, the effects of whose emotion had prevented her joining the sisters in the general thanksgiving which had been offered up directly after Sir Amiot's departure.

"Nay, indulge not my weakness by the offer, holy mother," was the reply, with a calm, quiet smile; "your wholesome rules must not be infringed by me, who am in truth but your prisoner."

"Say rather our esteemed and honored guest, despite the fearful feuds between our several countries," answered the abbess, gently. "We have taken little interest in this unhappy war, save to pray God to direct and bless the right, whichever side it be; but for thee, my daughter, we can feel much. We have guests, Scottish guests, this night, and therefore I would fain spare thee further pain; an thou canst look on them and speak with them without emotion, be it so; but an thou fearest the trial, remain here, with my blessing on thee still."

"I know not now how far I may trust myself, holy mother," replied the stranger; "once I knew not the very name of weakness, and could ever exercise control. But tell me, who may be the Scottish guests? I may perchance know them too well for composure in their presence, and then I had best be absent."

"King Robert's niece, the Lady Isoline Campbell, with her poor afflicted friend the Lady Agnes Bruce, and some three or four attendants."

"Lady Agnes Bruce! Who, what is she? I remember no such name," the lady said, somewhat abruptly, starting up as she spoke.

"The widow, Sir Amiot tells, of the youngest brother of the Bruce, the beautiful and accomplished Nigel, one of the earliest victims in this bloody war. Sancta Maria! my sister, what have I said?"

She might well ask, for the stranger had fallen back in her chair, so utterly prostrated by sudden emotion, as with difficulty to retain her senses, and recall them sufficiently for speech.

"And knowest thou who she was ere she became the wife

of Nigel?" she asked, in a low, gasping tone, laying her trembling hand on the arm of the abbess. "No; the knight did not tell thee, then I will. The wife of the noble Nigel was the Lady Agnes Comyn, daughter, sole daughter of Isabella of Buchan—the wretched, lonely Isabella."

"Alas! alas! my daughter, if it be so, how mayest thou bear to hear of her affliction?" responded the venerable abbess, flinging her aged arms round the bowed and drooping form, with an emotion little in accordance with her passionless features and sacred function.

"Affliction—what affliction? In mercy tell me!"

Briefly and carefully as she could the abbess narrated all she had heard from the knight. For a while the stranger listened with that fearful calm of feature betraying intense mental suffering, but gradually it softened, and tears fell fast and unrestrainedly, and partially relieved her.

"I ought to be thankful for learning even this, for having the agonized hopes and doubts of weary years solved even thus," she said, "and I will after a brief while; but to think on that mind overthrown—that lovely, that angelic mind; to picture suffering such as hers, and apart from a mother's love! Oh, holy mother, 'tis a bitter pang, and it must have way; but can I not see her, look on her?" she continued, clasping her hands in sudden hope, then dropping them despairingly. "Alas! we have both forgotten the condition on which I am here. What have I pledged myself to Edward? tell me, oh, tell me, for my brain refuses thought!"

"In truth I had forgotten it, my daughter, yet I know not if it bear on this: to associate with no children of Scotland who might by chance enter here, lest your person be discovered, and force used on King Robert's part to give you freedom; to hold no communication, either personally or by the agency of another, with your friends in Scotland; to reveal yourself to none, least measures be taken for your liberty, over which, in the present distracted state of the kingdom, his highness can have no control. Indeed, I had forgotten this, holding you but as a dear and cherished guest."

"But I must not forget it," replied the lady, with a dignity of mien and firmness of tone which at once betrayed the mental struggle was passed. "I may not hazard recognition. The Lady Isoline was in truth but a child when we last met,

yet she may not have forgotten. And Agnes, my poor afflicted one—oh, no, no! better sacrifice the longing wish to gaze once more on her sweet face—perchance I could not bear to feel myself unknown, unrecognized by her—her, my own; but I must not speak thus. Tell me, oh, tell me, where she sleeps. I may look on her there, though the voice for which my heart has so yearned may be silent, the light of those lovely eyes concealed. It were indeed bliss to hear somewhat of my country, of my king, my friends, to speak with Isoline—but no, it must not be, I will not think of it. Holy mother, let me but see my Agnes when she sleeps, I ask no more."

"And thou shalt, thou shalt, my daughter; would that I might give thee more, but thou wouldst not take it were it offered; it were but torturing thy noble spirit, and tempting thee to forget its pledge. I leave thee, daughter; the Holy Virgin bless and comfort thee."

The lady bowed her head before her venerable friend, and as the door closed on the retreating form, she sunk on her knees in prayer. Oh, not with us is the power of touching on the wild chaos of thought which she sought, in deep and lowly earnestness, to pour before her God. We may not lift the veil from that bleeding heart—true, faithful, noble; still rising purer and purer, if possible, from every trial which bowed it for the moment to the earth.

It was past midnight, and all in the convent was hushed; but there were thoughts at work in the heart of Isoline, banishing sleep so effectually, as to cause a feeling almost of envy at the quiet slumber—soft, dreamless as a child's—which closed the eyes of Agnes. They shared the same apartment, but the couch of Isoline occupied a recess, some distance from that of Agnes, and almost concealed by drapery. Knowing they were to depart early in the morning, Isoline had not entirely disrobed, and she now lay vainly courting repose, and, as is often the case, her nerves so strung, that the least sound startled them. She fancied a light footstep traversed the chamber, in a contrary direction to the usual door of entrance; her heart beat thick with undefined dread, but struggling with the feeling, she sat up and looked round. A female figure was kneeling beside the couch of the sleeping Agnes, shrouded in drapery except her head, from which, as if in the eager haste of her movement, the hood had fallen off, and exposed at once

her expressive features, the peculiarly fine shape of her head, and the rich black hair, which even sorrow and care had not yet touched with gray; she was very much in shade, but still there was something in the form of the head, in the attitude, in the intensity of her gaze on the beautiful sleeper, that riveted the attention of Isoline almost to pain. She watched her intently, she saw her bend over Agnes, and lightly removing the long soft hair which partially concealed her face, looked upon it with a depth, an intensity of love, that Isoline could not remark unmoved; minutes rolled by, and still she moved not, gazing as if her eye would print those features on her heart. Mournfulness mingled with the love, as if there was a change on that face only too visible, spiritualizing its expression, till it seemed as if that gazer could scarce believe it a face of earth, for once or twice she bent down anxiously, Isoline fancied to listen if she breathed. Her lips were pressed lightly on the brow, cheek, and lips of the sleeper, and her form shook as with the effort to restrain a sob, and then she bent her head on her hands as she knelt, and Isoline knew that she was weeping. A sudden thought—becoming conviction on the instant it flashed before her—caused Isoline to spring from her couch and dart across the chamber, till she stood close beside that kneeling form; but she was unobserved, unheard, and she could not speak to disturb that holiness of love. Again the stranger rose, again she looked on Agnes, and pressed her lips to her brow, and lingered, as if she had not strength to turn away, then, as with a powerful effort, she moved hastily from the couch, and her full face and form were exposed to the eyes of Isoline; the stranger started and endeavored to draw her hood closely over her features, but with all the enthusiasm of her nature, Isoline in an instant had flung herself before her, had clasped her knees, exclaiming, in tones only checked from fear of disturbing the sleeper, "Oh, do not leave me, lady, without one word; my mother's friend—friend of my whole race, of my country—speak to me. Oh, what joy to my sovereign to know that we have met!"

The Countess of Buchan—for wherefore should we conceal that it was her?—hastily and affectionately raised the maiden, then clasping her in a warm embrace, gently led her further from the couch of Agnes, and said, "Thy memory is better than I deemed it, my sweet Isoline. I believed thou, too,

hadst slept, or even the blessing of gazing on my child had been denied me."

"Denied thee," repeated Isoline; "alas! wherefore? Why, if they told thee we were here, didst thou not seek us before? But thou wilt away with us, wilt thou not? thou wilt not rest here? Oh, why dost thou look so sad?—is it impossible—art thou still a prisoner? it cannot be."

"My child, 'tis even so; my word has passed, and were King Robert and all his kingdom before these convent gates, they could not give me freedom, till Edward says 'be free.' I may not hold commune with thee, Isoline, blessed as 'twould be. I have heard that Robert is indeed a king; that my beloved Scotland is free. I have seen my child, my own sweet Agnes, and I must ask no more. I have pledged myself to shun all intercourse with the children of my country; and oh, my sweet girl, thou must not tempt me with those pleading looks, I am not what I was."

"But force of arms, of victory—the whole north of England hath bowed itself at King Robert's feet; can he not claim thee, then, as his lawful prize?"

"Alas! no, my child, for it is against such a contingency my word has been pledged; without thus revealing myself, King Robert nor any of my friends could know my retreat. More than once already my residence has been changed, because of visits, either in peace or war, from the Scotch, and that Edward has either doubted my word or imagined chance might effect my discovery. There are rumors of another change, but earnestly I trust they have no foundation, for I have met with warmer spirits, kindlier feelings here, than I dared hope for or expect."

"Then my uncle, my mother even, may not know of this. Oh, do not burden me with such a secret, lady," entreated the ardent Isoline, clinging closer to her. "Oh, you know not how we love thee still; how all in King Robert's court and camp pronounce with reverence thy name; how thy bold deed hath marked thee foremost midst the first and noblest of our country's patriots. The very rumor that thy cruel thraldom is at an end, that at least thou art comparatively at peace and rest from all torture save restraint, would be such blessing to so many."

"Would it, indeed, my Isoline?-am I still thus remembered,

or is it but thine own loving heart that speaks? Oh, thou hast indeed blessed me with these words; they will cheer my desolate heart; they will picture brighter dreams than I dared to look on, even at the thought of freedom. But I must not, dare not linger, sweet one, though my full heart knows not how to tear itself from thee and from my Agnes—my own, my precious child, and now, alas! my only one." Her voice, which had breathed more hope, more happiness in her first words than she herself could have believed possible from so slight a cause, sunk with the last so painfully, that it seemed as if days not years had passed away since her supposed bereavement. Isoline started; was she not aware of her son's existence, or did she speak thus, discarding him from her affections on account of his treachery, his alienation from his country? was patriotism indeed so much stronger than maternal love? She looked on the face of the countess, and felt it could not be. Something on her countenance aroused her companion's attention, and convulsively grasping her hand, she wildly exclaimed, "Isoline, Isoline, thou knowest something of my boy! Oh, speak to me, in mercy! he is with King Robert—he is not dead!"

"With King Robert—alas! no, dearest lady. But hast thou not heard—have they not told thee?"

"Heard—told me—torture me not by these meaningless words! say but that he lives."

"'Tis said, indeed, he lives, sweet lady, not for Scotland now, but as the petted minion of King Edward, the most devoted of that monarch's court."

"Isoline, they speak false!" replied the countess, in a tone that, suppressed as it was, almost electrified the hearer, it was so changed from the desponding sorrow of a minute before · "they speak false! my boy is dead, an this is all thou knowest; they have sought before to pour such poison in my ear, but I heeded them not, for I know that it is false. My child is dead, slain by a father's mandate, and thus, thus would he conceal his crime, and stain my angel Alan's name. And thou tellest me this—thou, daughter of Isabella's dearest friend, niece of him to whom my boy, with tears of shame at his line's disgrace, did swear his faith. Oh, how may it be my name is reverenced as thou sayest, and yet this foul tale believed?"

"Not by King Robert, lady; he holds it false, believing it

as thyself a base invention framed to hide a father's crime, or else that force not love compels the course of action he pursues."

"And blessings on him for that thought!" resumed the countess, softened almost to tears; "but no force would compel him thus. Perpetual imprisonment, chains, torture, death, would rather be his choice, and it has been; for he is dead, I know that he is dead," and her head for a moment sunk on the shoulder of her deeply sympathizing companion. "This must not be," she said at length. "It is sad to feel how utterly my mental strength has gone; it is well for me thou only art its witness, Isoline. Love me, pray for me, sweet girl; we may meet perchance in happier times, unless, indeed, my freedom be effected by a higher king than Robert, and my spirit join my child's. I need not bid thee love and cherish my poor Agnes—thou must, or thou wouldst leave her to other care than thine."

"Dear to me, cherished, tended as my own sister she is, sweet lady; aye, has been and will be, while she lives; trust me for her," replied Isoline fervently.

"I do trust thee, my child, aye, and bless thee for that love. May heaven's choicest blessing shield you both!" she folded Isoline fondly to her bosom as she spoke. "And now farewell; forget that we have met, yet love me, dearest, till we meet again."

"And the king," inquired Isoline, gently detaining her, as she turned again to the couch of her child. "must he indeed know naught of this? He deems thee still enthralled in Berwick's cage, and grieves that one who did for him so much should still pine 'neath such tyranny."

The countess paused in thought.

"Let him not grieve for this," at length she said, "nor spend his strength in the vain hope of reducing Berwick's impregnable fortress for my release. Tell him, an thou wilt, that we have met, that I am in comparative peace. but bound by stronger chains than iron to remain a prisoner till he effect my liberation by other means than force; yet let it not be publicly said that I am here, for my instant change of abode will be the consequence, and that would give me pain. Now, once more farewell, dearest. Speak of me to thy mother, tell her I love her still."

She gently withdrew herself from Isoline's passionate embrace, and bent once again over Agnes, who still slept calmly, undisturbed by those whispering voices; again she printed a long, light kiss on that pale, beautiful brow, and, without venturing another glance, glided from the chamber silently as she came.

CHAPTER VI.

A BUSTLING scene to the quiet inmates of the convent did the courtyard of our Lady of Mount Carmel present soon after dawn the following morning. Sir Amiot had drawn up his men in marching array, ready to do honor to his fair charge, and their glittering spears and radiant armor, their waving plumes and flying banners, the prancing and neighing chargers, all presented a scene of life, which its extreme novelty rendered peculiarly charming. Sir Amiot had suggested that a band of fifty picked men, under an experienced officer, should remain quartered in the village, lest the border plunderers should return, a suggestion the abbess gratefully accepted, herself and several of the elder sisters escorting the Lady Isoline and her companions to the gateway, where their palfreys stood. Eagerly Sir Amiot scanned the holy sisters, longing, he knew not wherefore, to look once more on the shrouded figure whose agitation had been so marked, but he saw her not. As his band wheeled slowly round the mountain, and he himself tarried, helmet in hand, to speak some courteous parting words to the abbess, his farewell bow was slightly disturbed in its grace by his eye catching, or fancying that it caught, that same noble form at an upper window, watching the progress of the soldiers. The question, "Who is she?" hovered on his lips, but he checked it as an idle curiosity, and galloped after his men.

The remainder of their journey to Berwick passed without incident. The Lady Isoline appeared little inclined for conversation, and kept closer to the litter or palfrey of Agnes, and Sir Amiot, though burning with impatience to clear himself in her eyes from all appearance of mystery or inconsistency, felt the impossibility of so doing too painfully, to venture intruding on her presence or attention unasked, and therefore little or no

conversation of any moment passed between them, and their further progress to Berwick was about as unsatisfactory, in consequence of this mutual reserve, as may well be imagined.

All was military bustle around Berwick. Operations had already begun, though it was rumored that King Robert, perceiving the immense strength and impregnability of the fortress somewhat hesitated as to the wisdom of wasting time and force on its reduction. That the Countess of Buchan was still supposed to be imprisoned there was the greatest if not the only cause of the king's determination to pursue the siege. The cage was still visible from the turret; but though it appeared empty, it was generally believed throughout the army that the countess had been only removed to mislead her friends, and cause them to raise the siege, and in all probability she was still in the same fortress, but in a more secluded prison.

Much surprised, then, were the troops when, about a fortnight after Sir Amiot and his charge rejoined them, the king publicly announced his determination to give up Berwick, at least for the present, send the greater part of his army to the aid of Sir Edward Bruce, who, returning successful from levying the Irish tribute, was then engaged in reducing every English-garrisoned fortress in Scotland to obedience, and march himself in a southwesterly direction to the sea-shore, where the galleys, sent by his brother, awaited him for the proposed expedition against the Isle of Man, whose governor, a branch of the hated house of Lorn, had several years previous treacherously and basely betrayed two brothers of the Bruce, Thomas and Alexander, into the hands of Edward.

Douglas had been successful in forcing Carlisle to terms, compelling its seneschal to pledge himself to peace with Robert, and make no disturbance when the Scottish troops marched southward. On these conditions he was permitted to retain his office, and the castle remained nominally Edward's. This accomplished, Douglas was to march his troops northward, at the same time that the king proceeded south, meet him at the destined port, and proceed with him to the Isle of Man. Isoline and Agnes, under the care of Randolph, were to return to Scotland.

The real, though secret cause of the king's determination to leave Berwick had been confided in a small, private council of the highest nobles and warriors of his realm, at which, strange

to say, the Lady Isoline was present. Nothing, however, publicly transpired, except the fact of their return to Scotland, a determination occasioning a disappointment to some of the most ardent, who had looked to nothing less than the complete downfall of Berwick, although the more numerous were satisfied that if King Robert's resolution, it must be a wise one. Sir Amiot, however, who had *not* been one of the above-mentioned council, being absent on some temporary mission from the king, on his return appeared so thunderstruck by the intelligence as to occasion the extreme surprise of his companions. Seeking the monarch's tent, he told him he had resolved to ride round the walls of the fortress, attended only by his page; ask a question, and receive an answer of the principal warder, and on his knee he besought the king to grant him permission for the accomplishment of his wish. Robert remonstrated, gently reproved the knight-errantry of the engagement as tending more to foolhardihood than real courage, but was at length compelled to yield, convinced, by the earnest manner of the knight, that some important though unexplained cause originated his resolve.

Great was the excitement this decision of Sir Amiot occasioned, particularly among his immediate colleagues, ardent and far more joyous than himself, many of whom longed to share his risk; but there was one person in the camp to whom it was a subject of most serious alarm.

"Can it be, that the wise, the moderate, the prudent Chevalier of the Branch is about to risk his life thus foolishly?" was the unexpected address of the Lady Isoline Campbell to Sir Amiot, as they chanced to meet in the sovereign's tent.

"Trust me, noble lady, my life, worthless as it is, save to her whose liberty I seek, is in no danger; yet do not scorn my grateful thanks for thy gentle counsel," replied Sir Amiot, in a tone that, despite all her efforts to the contrary, thrilled only too softly on her heart. "I told thee, noble lady, I looked to Berwick for the fulfilment of my hopes, the restoration of the prisoner I seek, and in that, restoration of my name. Can I see these hopes prostrated, crushed by this unexpected resolution of his highness, without one effort, even if it risk my life or liberty, to have them solved? Oh, lady, thou knowest not Amiot, an thou thinkest this could be."

"And how may this wild plan assist thee?" inquired Isoline,

with a softened expression in feature and tone, which gave him courage to proceed.

"I know not—in truth, I cannot know; but it is worth the trial. Oh, if she be still there, still the prisoner of Edward's wrath, night and day will I kneel before King Robert, beseeching him to turn not from this spot till yon proud citadel be gained, or its prisoners delivered up ransomless and free. If she be not," his voice sunk into utter despondency, "then I must turn again unto my weary path, hoping against hope, striving against time; knowing so little of her fate, that I may be seeking one who is not, dreaming of one who will never bless me more."

"Nay, an so much depend on thy adventure of to-morrow," replied Isoline, kindly, "go, and God speed thee! remember only, thy life is not thine own to fling away as nothing worth. E'en if the prisoner thou seekest be not here, she may still be elsewhere."

"Dost thou, canst thou feel interest in that life?" murmured the knight, bending his dark eyes upon her, with an expression which at the moment she felt she dared not meet. "Oh, lady, an thou dost, e'en were this hope void and vain as many another, life were still not all a desert—it had still one dream of joy."

"Sir Amiot," replied the lady, so calmly and firmly, that every half-rising hope shrunk back at once, "I listen not to such words, meaningless and void as they must be, with this mystery still clinging round you. I would believe you honest as you seem, noble and single-minded as you are faithful to King Robert, and gallant in his cause; give me not occasion to change this opinion by a renewal of words, which are somewhat too seriously spoken for mere gallantry, and yet can mean nothing else. I honor your devotion to an injured and imprisoned one; I could have wished to believe that one alone the object of your devotion, but I have by chance heard words addressed to and witnessed emotion occasioned by another which, increasing the mystery around you, compels me to feel that even were my conclusions wrong concerning the object of your vow, there is yet another existing cause which prohibits my listening to such words. I would feign believe you intend no insult, naught that could awaken indignation and displeasure on my part; that they are mere words of courtesy, somewhat too

highflown perchance for our relative positions, but an my favor be worth preserving, speak them not again."

She bowed slightly, perchance haughtily, and passed on; her beautiful form more proudly erect, her fair cheek slightly flushing, but giving no other bodily sign to contradict the calm and steady self-possession of her words. Sir Amiot stood bewildered, scarcely comprehending, and certainly not composed enough calmly to analyze sentences, whose sole effect appeared to be to dash down hopes, of whose very existence and whose powerful extent he was scarcely and certainly not at all conscious before.

The next sunset found Sir Amiot of the Branch in his tent; his adventure so gallantly yet so coolly performed, as to awaken the admiration not alone of his own friends but of the English on the walls, whose surprise at his daring paralyzed their arms, and permitted him almost an unmolested course. It was a deed in the very spirit of the age; both citizens and garrison looked on in stupefied amaze, as, armed cap-à-pie, his lance in rest, and followed by his daring page, holding aloft his master's banner, with the same bearing as his shield—the blighted branch—he slowly and deliberately made the circuit of the castle walls, directly under the darts and arrows of the soldiers, several of which struck his armor and bounded from it as if the steel were in truth invulnerable, and the knight bore a charmed life. He neared the drawbridge, was seen to halt before the warder's tower, spoke some brief words to that officer, but in a tone too low for the spectators of either side to distinguish their sense, though they observed with alarm that a band of English soldiers were silently and cautiously advancing, as if to surprise and surround him. The knight looked round him with a calm and proud smile, bowed courteously to the warder, and passed on, so utterly unintimidated by the foes gathering around him, as to awaken a shout of applause both from English and Scotch, and loud and fierce was the command of the English governor to the closing troop to bear back, and give the brave knight way.

Shouts and gratulations received him in his own camp; his companions crowded round him, eager to give him the meed of admiration, which in their young chivalric breasts had no shade of envy. Each troop shouted joyously as he passed, and even the king himself felt it almost impossible to preserve his grave

disapproval of the erratic deed. It was some time before Sir Amiot could break from his companions and seek the rest and quiet of his own tent, which even in the midst of that excitement, he seemed to crave; and when he was there alone with his page, all animation fled, leaving in its stead a sinking despondency, which his brave companions would have found it difficult to solve. For some time the page removed his armor in silence, but then, finding his master made no effort to rally, he cheerfully exclaimed—

"Do not despond, my dear master; rather rejoice that my beloved lady is removed from that horrible confinement, that though still a prisoner, she may be in comparative peace and comfort."

"But how may I know this, Malcolm? True, I should rejoice that at least she is no longer incarcerated where that tyrant Edward placed her, six years ago; but how may I rest secure as to her comfort? May it not be that because Berwick is now so near triumphant Scotland, her prisons are changed, but not their severity? She may be in equal suffering elsewhere."

"Hardly, my lord; there cannot be two such horrible places of confinement in England, particularly when we know this was erected by the tyrant's brutal policy expressly for her. No, trust me, if Edward has had pity enough to remove her from here, it is to place her in some more comfortable asylum, perchance even with Queen Margaret."

"But where, oh, where?" repeated his master, sadly. "Such thought does but lengthen the line of separation; for until the king can ransom those captives whose rank will only make Edward more tenacious of their persons, she, too, must languish a prisoner, and I can in nowise shorten that captivity. Better had she been still a captive in some northern castle, where my own right arm might give her freedom; and so she may be still, and yet concealed from me—and still, still, my hope is vain."

"Nay, an thou thinkest thus, my lord, and sayest, did a northern castle contain her, thine own right arm should gain her freedom, give me but leave of absence from the camp for a brief while, and trust me, an she be in the north of England, be it castle, prison, or convent, I will find her."

"Convent!" repeated his master, starting up, as if under the influence of some sudden thought. "Malcolm, Malcolm, have

I been such an idiot, a blinded, witless fool, as to be in her presence and not know it—can it be? no, no, it is impossible!"

"In heaven's name! my lord, what mean you?" exclaimed the page, astounded at such unlooked-for and mysterious emotion. "In her presence, and not know it? oh, 'tis impossible. When—where—how could it be?"

A few hurried words sufficed for the ready-witted boy to understand to whom the knight alluded, although he combated the fancy as impossible; however veiled and shrouded she might be, he declared his master must have known her. In vain Sir Amiot urged he had seen not a feature, heard not a tone of her voice, and with his firm conviction that she was still in Berwick, it was more than possible he had failed to recognize her. Malcolm still seemed to think the fancy too vague for reality.

Sir Amiot's first impulse was to beseech the king's permission to retrace his steps, instead of accepting the honorable commission offered in his homeward march; yet, as his page wisely alleged, what good could that possibly effect? It was far better for him (Malcolm) to leave the camp, and, commencing with the Convent of Mount Carmel, leave no stone unturned to discover her retreat. Left to his own measures, he assured Sir Amiot he could discover infinitely more than were he in company with others. He was certain, were she in any part of the north of England, however closely concealed or strictly guarded, he would find her out, and so watch the movements of her keepers as to learn every minutiæ concerning her present fate and future destination. That done, it would be time for Sir Amiot to lay down his plans for her liberation, or at least the alleviation of her captivity; till then, his master had much better remain where the favor of the king had placed him, and not give rise to any remark by even hinting a desire to leave the camp. The boy spoke so well and earnestly, Sir Amiot felt he could advance little against his argument, and conscious he boasted not a tittle more than he really could perform, consented to give him the leave of absence he demanded, and conjured him in God's name to do all he said speedily as might be. A definite period for his absence Malcolm could not or would not name; he would rejoin Sir Amiot, without fail, as soon as he had obtained the necessary intelligence, or at least obtained some clue, however slight, to her destination; more

he might not promise, and Sir Amiot felt satisfied, for he knew that, next to himself, the liberation of this important prisoner was dear to Malcolm. The following morning the page was to depart; but ere that night closed, even this engrossing subject fled for the time being from Sir Amiot's mind.

A large party of knights and noblemen supped that evening in King Robert's tent, and many a jest mingling with graver topics enlivened the festive hour. The king's seat, almost imbedded in the thick tapestried curtain that lined the canvas-covering of the tent, was divided several paces from the larger board, round which the more numerous of his warrior guests were congregated. Lennox and about five others of the senior noblemen, with two or three of his favorite knights, not amounting to more than ten altogether, shared the monarch's private table, five on either hand, and thus leaving an open space for him to look over his other guests, and sometimes join their converse. Sir Amiot, detained somewhat later than the rest by his exciting conversation with his page, had taken his seat at the bottom of the second table, which was exactly facing the king's seat, and commanding a clear view of the thick curtains behind it. On his way to the pavilion he had observed a dark shadow hovering, or rather crouching down outside, on a spot just answering to the sovereign's seat within, but believing it Robert's favorite hound, who often ensconced himself there, between the canvas and the lining, he passed on without further notice. He had not been long seated at table, however, before he fancied there was some movement in the tapestried folds, which could scarcely be occasioned by the wind, still he thought of the dog, and believed the movement proceeded from the animal's endeavoring to extricate himself from his retreat. A sudden bark, not two paces from him, however, proved the fallacy of the idea, for there was King Robert's hound close beside him, endeavoring, as it seemed, to arrest his attention. The shadow, then, which he saw, could scarcely have been the dog, and Sir Amiot, spite of himself, felt strangely startled; still he shrunk from noticing such slight signs aloud, for define what he saw or imagined was impossible. Presently the dog darted up the tent to the king's side, barking and restless, and furious when attempts were made to remove him from that one particular spot. For a while the king endeavored to soothe and pacify him, but that not succeeding, and annoyed at the ani-

mal's pertinacity, he desired one of the attendants to take him from the tent, a proceeding not effected without difficulty. His attention yet more awakened by this incident, Sir Amiot still kept his eye fixed on the drapery, but for so long a time after Bruin's retreat without discovering any movement, that he believed he had been merely under a delusion, and turned again to the board. Not long after, he was certain a gleam of steel flashed on his eye, proceeding, he could have sworn, from that same drapery, which again slightly moved; neither the king nor any of his immediate companions were in armor, and there certainly was nothing near them to have caused that sudden flash. With a silent but irresistible impulse, Sir Amiot quietly glided from his seat, and passing along the folds of the inner drapery, stood on the left hand of the king, nearly concealed by the curtain, almost before his absence from the table was discovered. It was well he did so, another moment, surrounded though he was by his faithful subjects, dreaming naught of treachery, closely shrined by hearts who would willingly have died for him, yet even then Robert the Bruce would have fallen beneath an assassin's hand, and the foul murderer escaped. Sir Amiot had moved with silence and caution, not alone to prevent observation on the part of his companions, but the better to watch the movement of the curtain, that if treachery did indeed lie ambushed there, it might not take fright at his vicinity, and escape ere its extent was ascertained. It was a daring plan, relying so much on his own single arm and personal address—but the knight knew his own power; he stood so completely between the king and the drapery, that no blow could reach Robert except through him—and the blow came. A dagger flashed in the air and fell, but, checked violently in its downward path by the bright sword of Sir Amiot, it snapped in two, the blade hurled violently across the king's table, giving the first sign, the first intelligence of the imminent danger the sovereign had escaped, followed instantly by the loud voice of the knight, "Ha! traitorous villain, thinkest thou to escape me?" a fierce though momentary struggle, and a powerful form, clad from head to foot in mail, for his shrouding cloak was torn aside, was flung violently to the ground, the knee of Sir Amiot was on his breast, the voice of the knight bidding him avow his treachery and die. In an instant all was wild uproar; nobles and knights sprung simultaneously to their feet,

their swords gleaming in their hands, execrations on their lips; the whole camp wild with confusion. The king alone, though startled, preserved his undaunted composure.

"Peace, peace!" he exclaimed, waiving his hand to command control; "we are safe, uninjured, thanks to my brave Amiot, though how he came so close to us at such a critical moment, by my kingly faith, I know not. Give way there! Unhelm the villain—we should know that form."

He was obeyed on the instant. Still prostrate, motionless, as if the failure of his desperate deed had been attended with a complete suspension of sense, the mailed figure lay beneath the knee of his captor. The helmet rudely and hastily unclasped, rolled off, disclosing features of a ghastly paleness indeed, but whose swarthy hue, expression coarse, almost to brutality, and black bristly beard and hair could belong to one alone. With a wild, shrill cry, which at another moment would have turned the attention of every one upon him, Sir Amiot sprung to his feet as if a dagger had pierced his heart, his poniard dropped from his nerveless grasp, his brain turned giddy, and a strong effort alone prevented his falling to the ground; he staggered back, till he found temporary support against one of the posts of the tent, and there stood, his eyes glaring on the prisoner, so changed from the Amiot of a minute before, as if some spell had turned him into stone; but so great was the excitement of the moment, and startling to all the identity of the prisoner that the strange emotion of the knight was unremarked Raised from the ground, his arms strongly pinioned, and so surrounded that escape was utterly impossible, they placed the prisoner before the Bruce, on whose noble brow the dark, terrible frown of wrath and hate was gathering; but dark as was his look, yet darker, fiercer was that of the foiled assassin; for not alone was it hate, undying, quenchless hate, but despair, the fell despair of hate and murder foiled.

"'Tis even as I thought. Earl of Buchan, we have met again," said the Bruce, speaking in those slow, suppressed tones terrible to all who heard, for they knew the fierce struggle that was at work within. "Man of guilt and blood, was it not enough to bind thine hirelings to a deed of midnight murder—enough, that twice, thrice, nay, seven times, a gracious Providence stretched out His arm 'twixt me and them, and proved how weak is guilt? Could this not satisfy thee, but thine own

mind must essay the murderer's steel, thine own mind frame an act of murder? Oh, thou hast done well! Nobles and knights will henceforth be tried in the light of John Comyn, Earl of Buchan; an they possess his knightly and noble qualities, the loudest voice of fame and chivalry must needs be satisfied."

"Deemest thou so bounded was the Comyn's hate, that aught of what men term fame and honor could weigh against it?" replied the prisoner, gloomily. "Robert of Carrick, I thought you had known men better. Didst dream, because some score of hirelings failed to accomplish the deed of death, Comyn of Buchan would swerve from the hate which, stronger than any vow, bound him to thy destruction? Murder—nay, an thus thou speakest, I have learned the trade from thee."

"Away with the sacrilegious villain—away with the murderous traitor!" shouted many eager voices, and there was a rush as if to drag him from the tent, but at a sign from the king they paused.

"Nay, let his idle words have vent, my friends," he said. "The Bruce would have given his head to Edward's axe ere he would have secured his safety by the treacherous murder of his foe. To you I need scarce say this; then what evil can that bold bad man's insinuations do? No, an it give him pleasure, let him rail on."

"Pleasure!" repeated the imprisoned earl, with a scowl and tone of concentrated hate. "Ye have foiled me in the dream of years, the vision which has been the only bright gleam of my existence—thy death—thou hated foe of the house of Comyn; for this I bade them report me dead. I hid myself from man to brood on this, to arm my followers against thee, and bid them die accursed if they failed; for this I have hovered round thy path, well-nigh lashed to madness, when weeks, months rolled on, and found me still seeking that which the veriest chances seemed determined to deny me. To-night, to-night I would have done it, aye, in the midst of thy proud court, thy mock parade of royalty: who would have saved thee? Murderer, thou wouldst have fallen; ten thousand curses light on him who stood between me and my revenge!"

A low convulsive groan, as wrung from the very depth of agony, filled up the pause which followed these words. Men knew not, traced not whence it came, for their spirits were still

under too great an excitement for such a slight sound to be remarked.

"Murderer—the name is threefold thine," replied the Bruce, calmly. "Villain, where is thy son, the brave and noble boy whose only crime was loving Scotland and his sovereign better than his race? What hast thou done with him? lieth not his murder at thy door, and darest thou speak of blood ill shed?"

"Aye; for on him I did no murder," replied the earl, bluntly and freely; "the boy was wise, and chose honor and life and a monarch's favor rather than perpetual chains. Look to thyself, thou upstart shadow of a sovereign; his father's vow is in keeping—he hath learnt the hate and claims of Comyn."

"False, false—'tis false as hell!" was slowly and distinctly uttered by some one within the tent, but none knew or traced by whom.

"Aye, by my kingly faith, I still believe it false, and would say thou liest, base traitor!" resumed the king, sternly. "But wherefore bandy words with such as thee? Thy hate to ourself we pardon, but not thy treachery to Scotland. Away with him! to-morrow's dawn he dies."

There was no need for a second bidding; with a fierce yell of triumph and detestation, they dragged him from the presence of their sovereign. They stripped him of his armor, loaded him with chains, and, with a strong guard both within and around the tent which served them for a prison, left him to his meditations.

"And where is our brave preserver, our gallant and faithful Amiot? We have been detained only too long from acknowledging our grateful feeling of his loyal service. We would fain know how he was at our side when most needed; a minute before, methought we pledged him at the board—where is the gallant knight?" So spoke King Robert, when some degree of order was restored within the tent, but Sir Amiot had disappeared.

To allay the clamor and excitement which the news of this providential escape from assassination created in the camp, King Robert mounted his horse, and, all unarmed as he was, slowly rode through the several ranks which had gathered under their respective leaders to receive him. Nothing could have given them a stronger proof of his own utter fearlessness

of any further lurking treachery, or a more gratifying sign of his perfect confidence in their love and devotion as his dearest safeguard from such treasonous attacks; they thronged round him as he appeared, making the night eloquent with their rude yet heartfelt cheers of love and gratulation.

Deeply moved by these heart-stirring manifestations of a people's love, it was only when seated in the quiet and solitude of his private pavilion near midnight, he found leisure to remember that he had not remarked Sir Amiot amongst the groups of officers he had passed, and he was rising to make some inquiry concerning him from an esquire in the ante-chamber, when the missing knight himself stood before him.

"At length, my noble Amiot!" exclaimed the monarch, springing up and grasping his hand, despite the young man's resistance; "where and wherefore hast thou been hidden these long hours, letting my gratitude lie on my heart till it has well-nigh choked me? Shame on thee! knowest thou Scotland owes to thee a king and Bruce a life?"

"Nay, good my liege, my lowly service demands not any spoken gratitude; my thanks are to heaven, that I was His selected instrument in thus preserving thy most precious life; but for aught else, my noble sovereign, speak not of thanks: that thou art saved, uninjured, is enough, oh, more than enough—'tis blessedness for Amiot! What had I been in this camp without thee?"

"What? why a noble soldier still," replied the sovereign, joyously. "Did I make thee the gallant warrior, the prudent counsellor, the able general thou art? No, Amiot, no; thine own good qualities have won thee love and estimation in the camp, aye, and still more, in Robert's breast; and now, because that is not enough, an Scotland loves me as she would manifest, and we would fain believe, why, she owes thee a debt of gratitude she never can repay; for, by my faith, hadst thou not been beside me, that one moment had been my last. And what, in heaven's name, brought thee there, so coolly and calmly shielding us from the villain that the danger was unknown till it was passed?"

Sir Amiot related the signs he had witnessed, and the suspicions they had occasioned, acknowledging that he was so little conscious of the actual danger which threatened, that he

scarcely knew how he had warded off the blow, or how obtained possession of the murderer.

"And my poor hound would have warned me, had I listened to him," mused the king, patting the faithful animal's noble head, as he lay crouched by his side. "Bruin, Bruin, canst thou forgive me?"

The dog licked his hand, as in mute reply, and the king continued—

"Ah, that's well; and now, Amiot, what ails *thee?* Thou hast something on thy heart, something that grieves, or at best torments thee; thou hast told a tale that at another time would have lighted up that dark eye of thine with living fire, and made thy voice ring out with animation, and now thine eye is dull, and thy voice is grave. What ails thee, boy? Speak not to the king, but as to thy friend, thy father, if thou list."

"In truth, there is a weight upon my heart, most gracious sovereign, and one thou only canst remove," replied the knight, in a low, suffocated tone, and sinking on his knee.

"Name it then, mine Amiot, in heaven's name! it were a relief to feel I could do aught for thee, for truly my debt to thee is heavy, even forgetting the service of this evening. What wouldst thou? surely it needs not thy knee—up, and speak to me as friend to friend."

"Oh, pardon me, my sovereign, I cannot rise! my knee is a fit posture for a boon like mine, and one, whose very origin I may not speak. In truth, I came a suppliant, and of a boon so weighty, my tongue shrinks from its speech."

"Nay, that may be, and yet the boon be not so very weighty, my modest Amiot," replied the king, encouragingly. "Thou thinkest so much of the very smallest kindness, that truly I believe thy mental vision magnifies every action save thine own."

"No, no—judge me not now by the past," said the knight, in a tone of intense suffering. "My liege, my liege, I come to ask that which all Scotland will rise up to deny, which every private and public feeling as a man, as a king, will call on thee to refuse."

"By my kingly crown, Amiot, thou triest our royal curiosity sorely," answered the king, still endeavoring to jest, though the voice of Sir Amiot jarred painfully on his kind heart. "What is this weighty boon? out with it—trust me, it shall be granted

an it can; for what Scotland can have to do with a subject 'twixt thee and me, I cannot imagine."

"It hath in this, my liege; the life of an attainted traitor, a treacherous regicide, is forfeited alike to his country and his king. Oh, must I still speak—thou canst not even guess my boon, 'tis too wild, too improbable! my liege, my liege, 'tis even so. I would beseech the life of him who hath sought thy life, who hath hunted, persecuted, armed a hundred hands against thee—even him, the husband of Isabella—Comyn of Buchan—in mercy, do not let him die."

"This is strange indeed, most strange," replied the sovereign, his first start and attitude of extreme astonishment subsiding into gravity, nearly approaching sternness; "a weighty boon in truth, and one how may we grant? Wherefore dost thou ask it—what is he to thee?"

"Ask not, sovereign of Scotland; ask not, if thou hast indeed one kindly feeling left for Amiot; ask not, for, oh, I cannot answer," reiterated the unhappy young man, in an accent of such utter abandonment, the king felt strangely moved. "Had any other hand but mine secured him, exposed him to this doom, perchance I had not dared implore thee thus; but as it is, his blood, his death will be upon my soul, crushing it to earth with a dull, dead weight, against which it can never, never rise. Monarch of Scotland, in mercy look not on me thus; there may come a day when this dark mystery may be solved, when I may tell thee wherefore I thus beseech, conjure thee; but until then, my sovereign, oh, my king, have pity on my deep wretchedness, grant me this man's life."

"That he may arm a hireling band once more against our life, pursue with midnight sword or poisoned bowl, till his end be gained. Amiot, for ourself we fear him not; but for Scotland, against whom he hath so foully, grievously offended, would this be wise?"

"Condemn him to perpetual exile; bind him by the most solemn oath that man can take, to forswear the shores of Britain forever and forever; keep him in ward, under charge of the truest officer your grace may select, until some far distant shore be gained: do this, my sovereign—I ask but his life, only his life. Oh, if thou wouldst not burden *my* life with a weight I can never cast aside, my liege, my liege, let not his blood be shed."

"What is Amiot asking so pitifully, gentle Robert?" said a sweet thrilling voice, so suddenly, that both the king and the knight started almost in terror, both too excited at the moment to recognize the tones of Agnes, whose light form, enveloped in flowing drapery, stood like some spirit noiselessly between them; "what would he have that Robert finds such difficulty in granting? Grant it, gentle Robert, for he is so kind to Agnes, and she can give him nothing, nothing in return."

"Tell me first, sweet one, why thou art here—wherefore not at rest?" answered the king, laying aside all gravity, all sternness, to fold his arm round her, and press a kiss upon her cheek. "Must I chide thee, loveliest, seeking me at such an hour alone?"

"Oh, no, thou wilt not, Robert. They told me that thy life, thy precious life had been endangered," she clung to him as if terrified even at the thought, "and there was such bustle and noise amidst the soldiers, I came to see if indeed thou wert as safe and free from ill as they declared thee."

"Didst doubt it, then, my love?"

"Oh, now I know not what I feared; not that thou wert injured. No, no, Robert the Bruce will live; his life is all too dear, too sacred for a murderer's hand. Said not the voice of Nigel he shall live, be free, be glorious, and doth he not shrine thee round whenever danger comes, and save thee, shield thee, that thou mayest be blessed? Oh, none shall hurt thee, gentle Robert; no hand shall thrive against thee. Thou knowest not how often I list the voice of my noble love breathing these solemn words; sometimes they sound even ere I see him in his beauteous dwelling—they tell me he is near. But what ailest thee, kind Amiot? thou art so sad."

"I plead a life," huskily murmured the knight, who, instead of benefiting by the unexpected apparition of Agnes to gain some portion of composure, appeared, if possible, yet more agitated. "Lady, sweet lady, plead thou with me."

"Ask it not, ask it not," hurriedly answered the king, more moved than he had yet been. "Amiot, Amiot, the sight of this poor innocent child hath brought darker and fiercer thoughts; bid her not plead for one she knows not as her father—one who hath heaped such wrongs on her mother's head and on hers, and on her ill-fated brother, be he alive or dead, that with loud tones call on us for justice and revenge. Trai-

tor against his country and his king, vile slanderer of his wife, destroyer of her peace, and of her children, and more, yet more than all, sought he not the prison of my brother, my noble brother, my own loved Nigel—aye, and taunted, vilified, tortured him, raised his murdering sword against him even then, when the next morning beheld his execution? Execution, said I: his foul murder. Did he not set Edward on against him, urging him yet more fiercely to seek his blood, when the tyrant might have pardoned Thomas, Alexander, and Seaton, my sister's husband? Cries not their blood aloud, and shall I not have vengeance?"

"Vengeance! who spoke of vengeance?" answered Agnes, starting from the sovereign's side, and standing suddenly erect, voice, feature, movement, all denoting a fearful state of excitement. "Vengeance! vengeance! said he not? Thou shouldst not dream of vengeance, sully the pure flame of patriotism and of freedom. No, no! Robert of Scotland, thou shalt not seek vengeance; thou shalt not blacken that fair name my Nigel shields. He speaks to thee; he bids thee pause in this work of blood—see, see! he hovers o'er thee—his beautiful smile is gone; he trembles lest in this dread trial thy wonted strength should fail. Oh, do not anger him; Robert, Robert, for his sake, seek not vengeance. Hark! canst thou not hear? He speaks, he charges thee—give up thy vengeance. He will vanish in wrath, fold up that lovely form in sorrow. Speak; Robert, Robert, king, father, let him not go! Nigel, my beloved, my own, come from that shrouding cloud; speak, speak thyself. Oh, he hath gone, gone!—and still, still he bids thee seek not vengeance."

Her voice had grown wilder, shriller, till its sweet bird-like notes were utterly lost, and she had flung herself at the feet of the king, convulsively clasping his knees, while her beautiful eyes alternately gazed on the king, and then wandering wildly round the tent, told only too painfully the fearful paroxysm, which seeming to bring madness to the verge of collected sense, was again in all its horrors upon her. In vain the Bruce strove to raise, to soothe her; she resisted, reiterating her wild entreaty, until Robert, in a low, deep, impressive voice won her ear to listen to these words: "Agnes, it shall be as thou wilt. Alas! poor sufferer, thou knowest not for whom thou pleadest, yet if thou didst, thou couldst scarce

plead more eloquently. Be calm, be content, sweet; for thy Nigel's sake, I swear I will not seek vengeance. I will ask mine own heart, and if indeed it whisper 'tis vengeance and not justice makes it thus inveterate, I swear he shall not die. Will that content thee, Agnes? Robert wills not vengeance."

"Content me? Yes, yes!" she sprung up, clasping her hands in joy, but the voice was scarcely articulate from faintness; her limbs so trembled Sir Amiot caught her in his arms. "And not me alone—see, he hath come again. My love, my own noble love; he stretches out his arms over thee, to bless, to shield thee; he smiles on us both, he calls us. Nigel, Nigel, oh, why may I not come?" she struggled to bound forward, but strength failed; her head drooped, her extended arms sunk powerless, and she lay like death in Sir Amiot's arms.

"Bear her gently hence, good friend: I feared this. Oh, when will these terrible attacks depart! Poor child, poor child, what have not these horrible wars cost thee! Gently, dear Amiot. Isoline's tent joins mine, that way; give her to my niece's charge; 'tis all thou canst do, and then do thou return." The king spoke in excessive agitation, and Sir Amiot, scarcely less agitated himself, only bowed in reply, and tenderly bearing the inanimate form of Agnes in his arms, vanished by the side entrance to which the king had pointed. Robert continued to pace the tent, till emotion was in some degree calmed. "Yes, yes," at length he unconsciously thought aloud, "had this foul traitor, this ruthless assassin, been other than Comyn of Buchan, I had not been thus inveterate, thus determined against my faithful Amiot's pleadings; then am I not actuated by vengeance, beside whose grim form justice is but a dim, formless shadow? My brother, my brother, hadst thou been in Robert's place, thou hadst not hesitated thus; and now, aye, even now, thou shalt be my guardian angel still. Thy last words bade me leave vengeance to other, higher hands; and oh, if thou canst look down on earth, thou knowest how often that charge hath checked my avenging hand, and given life, when every passion shouted slay; and now, now, shall they have less power now? No, no! Nigel, Nigel, for thy dear sake, thou wouldst give life, and so will Robert. Ha! returned, mine Amiot? Had the Lady Isoline retired? With whom didst leave thy poor afflicted charge?"

"In the care of the Lady Isoline, my liege; she had not yet gone to rest."

"Ha! and didst speak with her?"

"Briefly, my lord; she but detained me to ask if this evening's tale were true."

"Which thou must have answered, methinks, as briefly, to have returned so soon; well, she shall hear more to-morrow. For thy boon, it is granted; perpetual exile, on penalty of instant death, if found again on Scottish shores, shall be the traitor's doom. Nay, kneel not, look not such ardent thanks. I fear me, Amiot, had it not been for the Lady Agnes, the memories she brought, we had scarce attained sufficient self-command to have done this, even for thy sake, to whom we owe a life; therefore look not thanks, they do but speak reproach, which perchance we merit, but which as yet we cannot bear. And now, good night, my faithful soldier; we are not yet ourself, and would be alone."

Sir Amiot threw himself at the feet of the monarch, raised his hand passionately to his lips, and, without uttering another word, departed.

CHAPTER VII.

Seven days after this stirring event beheld the large army of Robert the Bruce divided according to his plans before mentioned. He himself had marched down to the shores of Dumfries, whence Douglas had already dispatched messengers, informing him that Solway Frith was filled with a gallant fleet, eagerly awaiting his arrival, and all impatience to take advantage of the first fair wind to sail for the Isle of Man. Robert had only waited for this, and the unexpected intelligence of Douglas being there before him expedited his movements. Randolph, with his fair charge, and the greater part of the remaining army, had also commenced their return northward, intending to make Edinburgh their resting, until they should receive other orders from Lord Edward Bruce. To Sir Amiot, with a third of the army, had been intrusted the safe keeping of the Earl of Buchan, whom they were to conduct to Dunbar,

and imprison in that castle, till a vessel for his transportation to the north of Europe could be prepared and manned. This done, Sir Amiot had demanded and received permission to join Lord Edward Bruce without delay, and those of his men who needed not rest were at liberty to accompany him. Few indeed there were who chose to turn back from such an expedition, for already had Dundee and Rutherglen bowed before his arms, and now Stirling—impregnable, all-desired Stirling—was the object of his attack, and resolute determination to obtain.

It was not long before a strongly-built, gallantly-manned vessel lay moored before Dunbar, waiting the prisoner she was to bear from his native land. Gloomily the earl had acceded to the conditions offered by the Bruce, accepting his life at the price of perpetual exile; his was no martyr's spirit, whose glory hath sometimes shed a lustre even over crime. His hatred of the Bruce was the only marked feeling of his existence; he would not have cared to die, could he have given death unto his foe; but that object foiled again, and at the very moment of its fulfilment, his dark, suspicious spirit robed itself in the belief that even hell itself was against him, and all other efforts were in vain. He was no coward to fear to die, but he did fear the horrible ignominy of a public execution—the triumph such a fate would give, not alone his foes, but the country he had so basely abandoned, against whom he had inveterately fought—and therefore was it, when informed his sentence was perpetual exile, and his solemn oath demanded never to return to Scotland, he made the vow, unmoved in outward seeming, but inwardly relieved. The indignation of the camp at this wholly unexpected clemency of the king was extreme, breaking out into almost open rebellion, requiring Robert's royal authority to quell and soothe into content. Sir Amiot's share in this decision was never known; an indefinable feeling on the part of the sovereign prevented his ever speaking of it, and whatever the king might think—and he had thought on the subject—never quitted his own breast.

The evening was dark and lowering—that leaden appearance of sea and sky, and heaviness of atmosphere, which seldom fail to sink the heart with a species of despondency impossible to be defined, and as impossible to be withstood. The vessel lay like a gigantic shadow on the still waters; her sails, some furled around the masts, and others flapping idly in the heavy air.

A party of armed soldiers stood grouped upon a cliff, midway between the castle and the sea, evidently under orders, though at this moment taking various attitudes of ease; below them, and concealed from their observation, two forms were standing on the beach, looking out on the ocean, as if anticipating a boat to be lowered from the vessel, for the accommodation of the prisoner, to whom the signal of embarkation had been already given. They were the Knight of the Branch and the Earl of Buchan, both evidently under the dominion of some strong subject of interest.

"And who art thou that darest press upon me thus?" fiercely interrogated the earl, turning full upon his companion, whose features were still concealed by the half-mask and long drooping feather of a military cap. "Is it not enough that thine arm foiled me in my purpose, saved my hated foe, and made me what I am? that thou art the one selected to keep watch upon me, poisoning my few moments of tranquillity with thy hated presence, forever reminding me that I essayed a deed of murder, and it failed? Away! and leave to others the charge of my person, I will not answer thee."

"Earl of Buchan," replied the knight, in a tone which spoke only respect and deep sadness, "I took not this charge upon me to taunt thee with memories better forgotten; I accepted it, as my heart dictated, to spare thee the scorn, contumely, harshness, which from other than myself had been thy portion on thy journey, in thy prison, aye, till Scottish shores had faded from thy view; nay, thy very life had been endangered, and 'twas for this I took this charge upon me—for this his highness offered it."

"Oh, the life of a Comyn must be of marvellous worth to a petted follower of the Bruce," answered the earl, his harsh voice unsoftened by the calm sadness of the reply. "Methinks thou hast a marvellously eloquent gift of oratory; yet that my life, my comfort were in thy thoughts when this honorable office was tendered thee by that spoiled minion of fortune they call a king, I pray your mercy for its disbelief."

"Perchance, my lord, the fact that thy life was granted at my entreaty may in part disperse a disbelief but too natural for the rest—"

"Ha! my life granted at thy request; and what, in the fiend's name, is my life to thee?" interrupted the earl, some-

what less fiercely; "yet, if it be so, I thank thee. Exile is preferable to death on a scaffold, aye, and better still, than compelled to call that hated Carrick king."

"Perchance, then, my lord, thou wilt bear with my presence the remaining interval we must pass together; pardon that which may have hitherto seemed intrusion, and believe that which I have asserted relating to thy comfort is truth, strange as it may seem. If I have failed in aught that could have softened the harshness of imprisonment, I would pray you pardon it, that we may part in peace."

The earl looked at him with an astonishment which had the effect of almost softening the swarthy ruggedness of his features.

"Thou art marvellously well-spoken, young man; by mine honor, I should doubt those soft-sounding speeches, were we not to part so soon that I can guess nothing of thy drift. In heaven's name, who and what art thou? why didst thou press upon me thus but now a subject that ever drives me mad?"

"Nay, 'tis on that I must still speak, on that I must still brave thy wrath," answered the knight, boldly, yet still respectfully. "Earl of Buchan, I know that the tale thou tellest of thy son is false, I know that of him thou art no murderer; and I would know, aye, on my knee I would beseech thee, tell me, wherefore hast thou forged this groundless falsehood—wherefore, oh, wherefore thus poison the minds of his countrymen, that if, in his own proper person, he should appear again amongst them, naught but mistrust, dislike, misprision will await him? My lord, my lord, wherefore was the need of cruelty like this?"

"Wherefore—art thou so dull-witted as not to know? Wherefore create scorn, misprision, mistrust amid his countrymen?—that he should never join them. Thinkest thou I, a Comyn, can look with composure on my own son joining hand and glove with my foes? No, by every fiend in hell!—but why speak thus? I have no son," and that proud, dark, evil-passioned man turned hurriedly from Sir Amiot, every feature almost convulsed.

"Then, then thou dost acknowledge the tale is false; Alan Comyn is not thus perjured!" exclaimed Sir Amiot springing after him, and grasping the earl's mantle as if to detain him. "Oh, in mercy retract the foul assertion; leave with me some

sign, some sealed and written sign, that will prove its falsity—tell to Scotland it is not Isabella's son that thus hath fallen; my lord, my lord, do this, and she, the wife that thou hast wronged, hast injured, even she will bless thee, and I—"

"Peace, fool; thinkest thou that I am mad, so fallen, that wilfully I will fall yet lower? retract a tale of years, and what retract? I have no son, save him that bears my name, my honor; that will be foes with my foes, friends with my friends, and such is he who bears the name of Alan Comyn, who is the friend of Edward. Retract—say that is not which is, and that which is is not; that she, whose rebellious spirit first created these evils, made me yet more the thing I am, may bless me. Pshaw! think of some better incentive, or thou pleadest in vain."

"Alas! there is none; if thine own heart refuseth justice to thine own child, what can a stranger plead?" replied Sir Amiot, mournfully.

"Justice to mine own! Was the boy taught to do his father justice? was he not taught to hate, scorn, contemn me, to abhor, even to raise his prayers to heaven against my course of acting?"

"No, believe me, no!" replied the young knight, raising his clasped hands, and speaking in a tone of truthful fervor, impossible to be mistaken. "Oh, believe thy son was taught to love, to reverence thee as his father, even while he imbibed principles of patriotism contrary to thine own. Condemn thee! oh, how little knowest thou Isabella of Buchan; never, never did one word derogatory to the respect due to thee, as the husband of her youth, the father of her children, mingle in the instructions lavished upon them. Earl of Buchan, thy son would have reverenced thee, aye, loved thee, hadst thou not with a rude hand so torn affection's links asunder they never might be joined."

"And who art thou that darest tell me this?" answered the earl, darkly and terribly agitated. "I tell thee I have no son; the boy is dead—dead through my fiendish cruelty, though not by mine order. I would have given my right hand, aye, more, I would have forsworn my hatred to the Bruce, drawn back from my vow to compass his death, had this not chanced, had the boy lived; but he is dead—dead. His blood is upon my head, though not upon my hand; and what matters, then, my future fate? I have no son, save him whom men term

Alan Comyn, minion of England's Edward; and what, then, should I retract? No, no, the boy is dead—dead through me; and shall I proclaim this by the avowal that I am his murderer? Never, by the blue vault above us, never!"

"Wouldst thou the boy lived now, Earl of Buchan? didst thou know the boy lived, wouldst thou retract this tale, and more, retract the foul slander on Isabella's name, which severed those links that bound the son unto his father, and crushed his young spirit far more than those chains and dungeons in which 'tis said he died—wouldst thou do this, my lord? 'Tis no idle parley; give back thy son to life, retract the slander on his mother's name; for if he died through thee, 'twas that which slew him: do this, and Alan lives!"

"Ha! canst recall the dead to life—tell me the boy lives—that of this black deed Buchan is guiltless—tell me he lives? If thou canst, I will believe what thou wilt; that Duncan of Fife told me false; that his sister, my wife, is pure and true as I did believe her, despite my hate, until he spoke those words that added fuel to my wrath, and heaped ten thousand injuries on her ill-fated head. I love her not, I cannot love her; but an thou canst prove my boy lives, I will believe her guiltless, proclaim that I have foully wronged her; prove that of my son I am no murderer. Ha! God in heaven, what is this—who art thou? speak! Do my very eyes turn traitors, and tell me that which is not?"

"They tell thee truth; believe them, oh, believe them," answered Sir Amiot, who was kneeling before the earl, his features exposed to the light of day, and his long, glossy hair falling back on either side from a face so faultless in its proportions, so beautiful in its expression, that it imprinted itself on the heart of that dark, harsh man as something scarce of earth, something sent from heaven. His eyes fixed themselves upon the kneeling form, so full of grace, of simple dignity, on the face upturned to his, in such glowing truthful beauty—fixed till the eyelids quivered either beneath the intensity of the gaze, or from some emotion never felt before; and as he laid both hands on the shoulders of the young man he was aware that his whole frame so trembled he must have fallen without such support. And was this Comyn of Buchan, the cold, harsh, merciless, bloodthirsty Comyn—the cruel, injurious husband, the neglectful father, the traitor to his country, the would-be

assassin of his king? Was this the man, bowed to the very dust, his whole being changed, every dark thought for the moment crushed beneath the mighty power of one emotion—that which is the breath of the Eternal, the symbol of "that likeness in which made He man," found alike in the blessed and the accursed, the angelic and the reprobate, breathing of that divine origin which the veriest sinner cannot utterly cast aside; it will be heard, it will find vent, coming like a ministering angel to the darkest, hardest heart, and whispering of better things, aye, even of hope 'mid sin; for if that love hath voice, hath being in the guilty sons of earth, what must be its power, its might, its durance in Him who hath breathed it in his children, and called himself their Father?

"Kneel not, kneel not. God in heaven! why am I thus—what is it that hath come upon me? I who have dreamed but of hate, and blood, and murder. I cannot love, yet what is this? Boy, boy, do not kneel; 'tis no fitting posture for such as thee, and to one hardened, blackened as Buchan. Up, up, I cannot bear it."

"Father, I will kneel till thou hast blessed me; till thou hast recalled that horrible curse thundered against him who stood between thee and thy vengeance; till thou hast pardoned that which seemed rebellion 'gainst thy power, but which, oh, I could not avert, for Scotland and my mother had yet stronger claims than thee. Father, I will not rise till thou hast blessed, till thou hast pardoned."

"Blessed—boy, boy, oh, do not mock me—blessed, and by him that would have murdered thee, who hath poisoned thy fair name, and laid such heavy misery upon thy youth; pardoned, and 'tis I have wronged thee unto death!"

"Yet art thou still my father—still I am thy son: oh, 'tis no mockery, father, thou knowest not thy children; oh! that it might have been, thou wouldst have found no failing in their love, and 'twas a *mother* taught it—aye, to respect, to cherish, e'en though duty threw us on such diverse paths. My father, thy curse hangs like a cloud upon my drooping spirit, thy blessing will give me strength for further trial."

"Boy, boy, I cannot bless; I know no prayer, no word meet for that dreadful Judge I never thought of until now. I will learn prayers to bless thee, and then—oh God, my son, my son!" Could it be that voice was choked—that bad man's

arms were round that youthful form, in strong convulsive pressure—that thick and scorching tears fell, one by one, from eyes that knew not tears before? 'Twas even so, slowly, almost convulsively, the earl roused himself to gaze again upon his son. "And thy mother taught thee thus, gave thee such principles, instilled such feelings, when I gave only cause for hate, alike from her and thee? Tell her I crave her pardon, proclaim to the whole world I have foully wronged her. Oh, that I could force the black lie back into the slanderer's throat at the sword's point."

"Leave that unto her son. Hark!" he hastily resumed his mask, "not yet may I proclaim my name, my vow is yet to be accomplished: they come to part us. Oh, my father, think upon thy son; we shall yet meet again."

The earl shook his head mournfully.

"My son, that will never be; but trust to me, by the heaven above us, I swear I yet will do thee justice! there seems a black veil withdrawn from my heart and eyes. I do not yet know myself; but it will not pass—no, no, that face will come between me and returning darkness. I know not how thou wert saved, but 'tis enough, I am no murderer of my child."

What more might have passed between them was unknown; they had unconsciously passed this harrowing interview in a fissure, or open cavern, whose projecting cliffs concealed them from all observation from the sea, and prevented their perceiving the expected boat had been lowered, and now lay some fifty yards from them, waiting for the prisoner; the wind was rising, and promised too fair for further delay. Little did the soldiers who were to conduct the earl to the ship imagine the emotions at work in the hearts alike of their officer and his charge. Calmly, to all appearance, they walked side by side to the beach; they stood one minute in silence, gazing on each other, and the stout frame of Buchan was seen to quiver, as bent by some mighty struggle, his swarthy cheek turned ghastly pale, he made one step forward, half extended his hand, drew it back, as conscious that every eye was upon them, and thus they parted—the earl to hurry into the boat, crouch down on one of the seats and bury his brow in his mantle, till not a feature could be discerned; Sir Amiot to linger on the beach till the boat reached the vessel, and slowly her sails were seen to expand, and heavily, as if reluctantly she faded from his

view. The varied emotions swelling in his bosom, the tumultuous thoughts occasioned by that interview, the words longing for vent, but doomed to rest unsaid, must be left to the imaginations of our readers: we are no more at liberty to lift the veil from them, than remove the mystery which Sir Amiot's vow still kept closely round him. He was still the nameless solitary unto others; and to us he must still remain so, till his own hand removes the mask, his own lips proclaim his name.

It was not till this excitement had in part subsided, not till the military confusion and joyous spirits around Stirling, presenting other engrossing subjects of reflection, had somewhat turned the current of his thoughts, and engaged him enthusiastically in all Lord Edward's daring projects, that he had at length leisure first to marvel, and then to grow uneasy at Malcolm's protracted absence. Despite the new subject of interest to his lord, occasioned by Buchan's attempted crime and consequent detention, the page had set off on his expedition the ensuing morning, as had been resolved between him and his master. One month extended over two, and not even the interest of the siege could prevent Sir Amiot's rapidly increasing anxiety. At length, nearly ten weeks after they had first parted, without either announcement or any outward semblance of long absence, Malcolm stood before him, with just the same quiet mien of respect and arch expression of feature as if no interruption whatever had taken place in his daily service to his master. Not so unconcerned Sir Amiot; springing to his feet, the plan of the castle, which he had been intently consulting, dashed down in the violence of the movement, he caught hold of the boy's hand, wildly exclaiming, "Returned at length, and successful! oh, tell me, where hast thou been—what done? hast discovered any trace? Quick, Malcolm, quick!"

"Will one word satisfy thee, my lord? found, found!"

"God, I thank thee!" was the passionate rejoinder, and Sir Amiot threw himself back on his seat, agitated almost beyond control. "But where, oh, where? Is she but found to mock me with the vain dream of liberty, of life, alike to her and me? found, but to be lost again, till this poor country may pay her ransom?"

"She is where thou shalt rescue her, my lord."

"Ha! where, in St. Andrew's name?" Sir Amiot sprung up in ecstasy.

"Even in this goodly fortress, this coveted, impregnable Stirling."

"Here, here! oh, say it again. How can it be? when—whence—art sure?"

"My lord, give me but breathing-time, aud thou shalt learn all this strange tale, fast as my lips can speak it."

Sir Amiot with an effort brought down his excited nerves to some degree of composure, and listened with intense interest to Malcolm's brief yet important tale. Although believing it utterly impossible his master could have seen the prisoner, in whose weal his whole being seemed involved, without recognizing her, the page yet directed his first course towards the Convent of Mount Carmel. Much caution and readiness did it require for the perfect completion of his delicate mission, for the late attack on the hamlet had rendered the sisters yet more guarded in their communications. Our space will not permit us to follow the ready-witted boy in all the intricate windings of his divers plans, suffice it that he had been perfectly successful. At the outset he had ascertained that a Scottish prisoner of distinction was under wardance of the Abbess of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and, at the imminent risk of his limbs, and imprisonment if discovered, he contrived to conceal himself in the garden of the nunnery, and see her, too distinctly for even the shadow of a doubt as to her identity to remain. Assured of this, he hovered about the neighborhood, having heard some rumors as to her removal; rumors, after a delay of some weeks, confirmed. The rest, to one like himself, was easy; he followed her guards, whose course, to his utter astonishment, was northward. Sometimes assuming disguise, he mingled with them, and learned that the distracted state of England, preventing all security for such an important prisoner, and almost incapacitating Edward from thinking of any thing but his own personal cares and griefs, had caused him hurriedly to accede to the request of the Abbess of Mount Carmel, in behalf of her prisoner, that if the late assault had determined his highness to change her present abode, she might be permitted a residence in one of the English garrisoned castles of Scotland; and the Earl of Derby, then marching to throw increased forces into Stirling, unconscious at the commencement of his march of that fortress's beleaguered state, was commissioned to transport her thither, with all due

respect. This was important intelligence for the faithful Malcolm, and inspired him with yet increase of patience to follow the earl on his tedious march, and never lose sight of his movements, often detained as they were by the devious and hidden paths they were compelled to pursue. The wild glens and passes of the Cheviot Hills brought them undiscovered across the country to the desolate part of the coast of Ayrshire. There, in detached parties, they took possession of some fishing-boats, and sailed up unsuspectedly to the very head of the lakes running up between Argyleshire and Dumbartonshire; there cautiously effecting a landing, the earl united his forces in the mountains and woods, and thus proceeded to the north of Stirling, so completely unsuspected, as to make his way that very day within the fortress, by a concealed postern leading to the underworks, their entrance covered by the desperate sallies of the besieged.

Sir Amiot listened to this narrative with the deepest attention, and then, with military precision, questioned his page again and again. Was he certain the prisoner was with them to the end? Had he seen her enter the castle, or might she have been left in any convent on their way? Malcolm could not answer this decidedly. He had been compelled to part from them some days before to elude suspicion, nay, from the period of their landing in Dumbartonshire he had only watched their proceedings at a distance; but he was sure that she was with them still, and that Stirling Castle was now the fortress in which the prisoner on whom so much of Sir Amiot's happiness depended was immured.

Sir Amiot scarcely doubted this himself; but he had experienced too much of suspense, of that deep agony of hope roused but to be crushed, to rest secure even on this intelligence, much as there was in it to encourage and inspire. He sat up half the night in earnest commune with his page, and at last his resolution was formed.

The next morning, somewhat to the astonishment of Lord Edward, his favorite officer, the Knight of the Branch, requested a week's furlough from the camp, coupled, however, with an assurance that within that time he should in all probability return, and bring with him information materially connected with the business of the siege. Sir Edward Bruce had too much confidence and love for Sir Amiot either to refuse or

question; there was a spirit of daring about him so much akin to the living fire of his own breast, that it was enough for the knight to hint any thing of a secret expedition, for Sir Edward to feel assured it must be something in which his whole spirit would sympathize and long to join.

Two days after Sir Amiot had departed, a minstrel made his appearance in the Scottish camp. He was clad in the green jerkin, leggins, and hose, with a short cloak of somewhat rich material for his fraternity, and secured at his throat by an emerald of value. Long curls of auburn hair shaded his face, which was almost concealed by a slouching cap and dark drooping feathers; his harp was slung across his neck; but there was something in his figure and martial step that would perhaps have seemed incompatible with his more peaceful employment, had not the exquisite taste and skill with which he touched his instrument confirmed the tale his dress proclaimed.

In the age of chivalry, the person of the minstrel was sacred as a herald, perchance yet more so, for where the latter might meet with contempt and rough treatment, the minstrel was ever received with honor and delight: his path was never stopped. He could pass free, and was welcomed with joy by opposing armies; both parties trying who could evince the more eagerness to listen to his lays, or show honor to his person. He could be sure of free passage through a besieging army, make his way unquestioned into the very stronghold of a beleaguered fortress; and therefore it was but in the very spirit of the time that the minstrel we have referred to refused the pressing invitation of the Scottish leaders to abide with them, and declared he was under an engagement to visit Stirling at a given time, which circumstances had already delayed; but being so honored by Lord Edward Bruce's great desire for his performance, he promised that, if the leaders would permit his departure without delay the succeeding morning, he would devote that evening to their service. The proposal was received with the greatest glee, and a joyous party met that evening to revel in the minstrel's lays. There was something in his joyous tone, in the buoyancy of youth and poetry which appeared to characterize him, that at once fascinated all hearts; while the spirit of his martial songs, the liquid richness of his deep-toned voice, held every ear enchained. A score of voices

pledged him in the sparkling wine; a score of voices shouted loudly in his praise; and Lord Edward himself, albeit unused to love the minstrel's art, vowed he was one well fitted for a warrior's guest, and detaching a golden brooch from his mantle, bade him wear it for his sake.

"For, by my father's soul, thou art the very king of minstrels!" he exclaimed; "and it is a crying sin and shame thou shouldst prefer the applause of those English knaves and that carpet knight Sir Philip de Mowbray to our own. Thy tongue favors the Scotch as fluently as the English. Whence comest thou? Edward of England would line thy pouch with gold pieces, I trow. An thou lovest the English, why not seek him?"

"Truly, my good lord, and lose my head for my pains. Know you not all Edward's minions are fated on the instant? Piers Gaveston's fate hath no charms for me."

"Thou art a ready-witted fellow, by my faith; hie thee to King Robert then, and thou shalt enjoy his favor, without any such drawback as envy to thy fame."

"Will your lordship grant me the opportunity of gaining that favor?—beware what you pledge, I may call on you to redeem it."

"Call on me and welcome; thy voice gains on my heart. I have heard but one like thee, and he—poor fellow, may his fate not be thine! I knew not his worth till he was gone," and Edward Bruce, the stern, harsh, iron-hearted warrior, passed his hand across his darkening brow as he thought of Nigel; the memory of his brother hushed his soul to silence.

The minstrel swept his hand across his harp, till a low, wailing strain woke from it, swelling louder and gladder, then he expressed in song so exactly the transcript of the Bruce's feelings, that he started in astonishment. A silence of several minutes followed the lay, whose simple homage to the noble dead found its echo in every heart, and then burst forth a shout of applause, ringing through the canvas walls till the very soldiers marvelled wherefore. Edward Bruce sprung up and grasped the minstrel's hand. "Sing that to Robert," he cried, "and thy fortune's made!" Modestly, though smilingly, the minstrel received the delighted applause; and thus, with many a rude present thrust upon him, he left the general's tent.

The next morning saw him present himself before the gates

of Stirling Castle, and he was instantly admitted. It was of no consequence that he had come from and perhaps tarried in the enemy's camp; he was a minstrel, and one too of no common seeming. Soldiers and officers hastened to greet him, and even the seneschal of the castle, Sir Philip de Mowbray, himself deigned to give him frank and joyous welcome.

"Truly, sir minstrel, thou hast come when most needed; we wanted some such pleasant guest to enliven our tedious beleaguerment. We have guests, too, fair and gentle guests, whom thy lays may chance to charm into forgetfulness that they are somewhile prisoners. We look to see thee grace our evening meal: see that thou disappoint us not."

The minstrel bowed lowly in reply, and the knight passed on; perchance the hours waned but slowly, despite the courteous attention he received on all sides. But at length he stood within the banquet hall of Stirling Castle, at length he glanced round the courtly crowd of knights and dames who occupied the dais, and there was a wild throbbing of sudden joy within his soul. They bade him sing, but slowly he obeyed, for he feared the quivering of his voice. There were many gazing upon *him*, but *he* saw but one, who sate somewhat back from the noble circle, her sable robes contrasting sadly with the gay dresses of those around her, though comporting well with that dignified and noble form, the sculptured beauty of those pale and pensive features. Beside her was a light and lovely girl of some seventeen summers, beautiful enough to have chained the eye and heart of any stranger, awake as was the minstrel to such impressions; but even her he saw not, save when he marked the sweet touching smile with which some remark she had made was met by her companion, the looks of love, of kindness lavished on her, and *then* he saw her, for he envied her position, envied the smiles which she received. The minstrel sang, and there was a pathos in his voice, an inspiration in his lays, and none there dreamed the wherefore. The jest was hushed, the laugh was stilled, for feelings were stirred within by the deep magic of the stranger's song; and the whole frame of the minstrel quivered as he *felt* the large, dark, melancholy eyes of that noble prisoner fixed upon him, for *meet* them he dared not, and his head bent down upon his harp till his long hair veiled every feature from her gaze; and thus the evening waned.

Two days within the given time Sir Amiot returned, and for some days the siege continued with little change to either party; but at the end of a fortnight, the Scotch had obtained possession of the posterns commanding the underworks, and thus completely stopped the passage of provisions from the town, which had hitherto afforded the besieged more than sufficient supplies. The blockade, which had gradually closed around the castle, now became complete, closing up every avenue, and reducing the garrison to all the horrors of threatened famine. This was, in truth, an important advantage gained, and Edward Bruce already triumphed in perspective. He pressed the siege with renewed vigor and most intemperate valor, seconded by all his troops, whose joy at this unexpected success carried them even beyond their usual bravery. Sir Amiot appeared in a state of excitement scarcely attributable to the affairs of the siege, repeatedly alluding to the immense number of the garrison and prisoners within the castle, and declaring that the famine amongst them would be fearful.

"All the better," said Lord Edward; "we shall starve them out the sooner; they must surrender at discretion."

"But ere they do this, my lord, what will they not endure? and the prisoners—the noble Scottish prisoners—how know we but in their desperation they may cut them off to lessen the number? such things have been."

"Aye, but not under the sway of such a luxurious, effeminate king as the second Edward. Trust me, knights and nobles take their stamp more from their monarch than they are aware of. Did Edward the Hammer rule in England, why his spirit would urge this Sir Philip to do even this—cut off his prisoners, his own men, did they dare murmur at privation, rather than surrender; but days are changed now, and I fear no such catastrophe."

"But famine, exhaustion for English soldiery, is of little moment; but for our captive countrymen, and some still less capable of enduring it, think of them!"

"And so I do; but what, in heaven's name, ails thee, Amiot? thou hast grown most marvellously tender-hearted. By my father's soul, were the thing possible, I could swear thy lady-love were prisoner in yon castle, an thou art thus anxious for her safety!"

"Thou hast said it!" passionately burst from Sir Amiot.

"Oh, Sir Edward, she, whom for five long weary years I have sought in vain—whose life, whose liberty, whose weal, are infinitely dearer than my own—she lieth in thrall under my very eye, separated from me but by beleaguered walls! Oh, is it marvel, now that I have thus neared that goal, towards which I have so long and painfully struggled, striving against disappointment, failure upon failure, which none have known or dreamed of—marvel that my doubting soul should now tremble, lest that which it has thus sought should fade away beneath my very grasp? She is there, impossible as it seems! Oh, Sir Edward, give me, oh, give me but the opportunity to obtain her liberation ere it be too late!"

"And so I will, believe me; only be calm, and listen to reason," he replied, too much astonished to inquire how Sir Amiot knew that which he affirmed. "How wouldst thou have me do this—take the castle by storm? Thou art too good a soldier not to see that is impossible, even for Edward Bruce's erratic brain. The fortress is absolutely impregnable, and what would be the use of so squandering Scottish blood? No, trust me, this blockade will bring those caged birds to terms fast enough, too fast for the evil thou fearest to accrue. Edward is too harassed by his affairs in England to care much for Scotland, and this Sir Philip knows; so he is not likely to be so heroic as to sacrifice prisoners, garrison, and himself by a prolongation of the blockade. Let things rest as they are for the present, and if at the end of fourteen days they have come to no terms, I pledge thee mine honor to resort to more active measures."

Sir Amiot was forced to be content, for, despite his fears as to the effect of this blockade on the comforts of the prisoners, his military experience acknowledged the justice of Sir Edward's representations, and he waited, with what patience he could, the issue.

Fortunately for his self-command, he had not to wait long; Edward Bruce's idea that self-sacrifice was not even in Sir Philip's thought, was speedily realized. A herald, with a white flag and properly escorted, appeared from the castle, demanding speech with the Lord Edward Bruce and his officers, on the part of Sir Philip de Mowbray, just seven days after the conversation we have recorded. A slight smile of triumph circled Bruce's lip, seeming a mischievous glance

directed towards Sir Amiot, who was standing at his right hand, as the English knight was conducted to his tent, and speedily made known his mission. Sir Philip de Mowbray, acknowledging the great valor and marvellous successes of the Scotch under all who bore the redoubted name of Bruce, pledged himself solemnly and sacredly as his opponents could demand, to surrender the castle of Stirling, the ammunition, arms, and treasure thereto appertaining, without any fraud or diminution, on the following Midsummer day (it was now January), if by that time it were not relieved. If Lord Edward Bruce would agree to these terms, Sir Philip swore, by the honor of a knight, to adhere alike to the letter and the spirit of his pledge.

The pause of consideration was brief amongst the Scottish leaders. The rash, yet daring spirit of their general was upon them all, and if they did think on the immense power of the sovereign of England, the great advantage the intervening period gave him in the preparation of an army, it was but of the increase of glory they should reap; many also believed the castle was as good as won, imagining Edward held it at too small a price to subject himself either to exertion or expense for its recovery. Unanimously, then, Sir Philip's terms were received and accepted; but when the hum of many tongues ceased, Sir Amiot stepped suddenly forward, and entreated a moment's attention.

"Tell Sir Philip de Mowbray," he said, addressing the herald, "that his offered terms are accepted by these right noble and worthy representatives of Scotland and her king; but that there is one condition annexed, an important condition, on the acceptance or refusal of which *our* acceptance of these terms must depend. We demand the surrender, not alone of the fortress, ammunition, arms, and treasure, but that there shall be no removal of the Scottish prisoners therein kept in thrall; that all those now there, of whatever sex, age, or rank, shall there remain to wait the issue, and be given up with the castle, without ransom, charge, or condition whatever, as the lawful gain of our arms: let Sir Philip pledge himself to this, and we will accede unto his terms. My lords, have I spoken well?"

A shout of assent passed through the tent, amongst which Edward Bruce's voice waxed loudest.

"Aye, by my father's soul, thou hast, and I owe thee good thanks for that which 'scaped my memory!" he frankly exclaimed, striking his gauntleted hand on the table. "Repeat this to Sir Philip, sir herald, and tell him, an he accede to this, we offer him personal liberty, and free passage for himself, four knights, and ten men-at-arms, as he shall choose, to the court of Edward, to report the conditions we demand and the terms he has proposed. We bid him put some mettle in his poor, weak shadow of a sovereign, and urge him to send relief, for we desire not to gain the castle at such easy rate: we defy him to the field." The herald pledged himself to the correct delivery of this message, and with a low obeisance withdrew. The anxiety of the generals was great for Sir Philip's answer, none more so than Sir Amiot and Lord Edward, and it came at length. Sir Philip, the herald said, acknowledged he had determined to transport his prisoners to some place of greater security, as he scarcely felt himself authorized to deprive the treasures of his master of so large a sum as the rank of his prisoners might demand for their ransom; but, on due and weighty consideration, he had resolved on accepting the offered condition. If not relieved by the 24th of June, 1314, he pledged himself to deliver up with the castle, not alone the arms and treasures pledged before, but every prisoner, of whatever sex, age, or rank, the fortress now, this day, 14th of January, 1314, held in thrall.

All was now joy and triumph in the camp; the blockade was removed, and Sir Philip speedily on his way to London, escorted to the borders with all honor by many young knights, burning with impatience for the issue of his journey. That there was any chance of defeat, any dream of failure, never entered into the thoughts of either soldiers or officers, and perhaps the first idea that the engagement entered into was not an overwise one, originated in the grave aspect of King Robert's countenance, when, on his triumphant return from the Isle of Man, and instant visit to the camp, the fate of Stirling was reported to him. There was no timidity, no doubt, no fears as to the result; such could have no resting in the soul of Bruce, but it was scarce approval. He spoke, however, no such sentiment to his soldiers, but when alone with his brother and other leaders, expostulated earnestly and eloquently on the extreme rashness of the engagement. The labor of years, the

toil and struggles of a whole nation, the weal of Scotland, nay her hardly-won liberty, the prosperity of her sons, all were risked by one rash word. He bade them remember that England, Ireland, Wales, part of France, even of Scotland, would spring up at Edward's clarion call, and to them what had Robert to oppose?

"Your highness thinks, then, Edward will fight? By my father's soul, his kingly sire should rise from his grave to give me thanks for snapping the flowery garlands around his son, and giving him incentive to fight," was Sir Edward's reply, finding some difficulty in restraining his impatience before his royal brother.

"It is a great chance whether he do not," rejoined another leader. "I think he will deem Stirling Castle not worth the trouble or fatigue of buckling on his armor."

"So perchance Edward's self may think," replied the king, "but not so will Edward's subjects. My friends, I know the mettle of the English; that hath not departed with their warlike sovereign. A dozen English barons I could name would arm themselves and vassals, and march northward, with or without their king's consent, and Edward, effeminate and weak as he is by nature, would not submit to this. No, their spirit will act upon his, and he will wake from his lethargy to a full sense of the neglect and indifference of past years, endeavoring to atone for them by one sweeping blow, calling his whole dominions to his aid."

"And let him do so!" impetuously exclaimed Edward Bruce. "Robert, I know that in this thou speakest as the king and not the warrior; thou fearest for the weal of thy country and thy devoted subjects, as a king; perchance, 'tis right thou shouldst; but I tell thee no more ill will accrue from this than that thou wilt become possessed of treasure, prisoners, and glory. It will bring this continued struggle to a crisis; it will bring Scotland against England as she should be, in firm and bold array; and what signifies disparity of number? I tell thee, Robert, we shall win, and thou wilt yet thank me for entering into such engagement. Let Edward bring every man he has, and we will fight them, were they even more!"

King Robert looked on the kindling features of his brother, on his noble form, dilating with the passionate ardor of his words, and on the countenance of every knight and leader,

then bearing in vivid light and shade the echo of such sentiments, and he could no longer control, by the more prudent maxims of the sovereign, the bold spirit of his race and his knighthood.

"Since it is so, brother," he exclaimed, "manfully and fearlessly will we abide the battle, and call upon all who love us, and value the freedom of their country, to oppose this English king! Aye, though backed with the flower of his kingdom, though aided by knights from every State in Europe, for the rescue of this castle of Stirling, yet will we abide him, and bring him, if not force 'gainst force, the willing hands and dauntless spirits of the free."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Nay, surely we have given thee time enow, lady mine, thou canst not in conscience ask more," the King of Scotland said to the lady Isoline, some five months after the conclusion of our last chapter. They were together in an apartment of the Convent of St. Ninian, where Isoline had chosen to take up her abode, her impatient spirit not permitting her to wait the issue of a battle for which the whole of Scotland had risen, sheathed in mail, even at the moderate distance of Edinburgh Castle. The Convent of St. Ninian was situated rather less than two miles from Stirling, round which fortress for many a rood the Scottish army had gradually assembled, to the amount of nearly thirty thousand men; with them, however, as with the immense preparations and gorgeous armament of England, we have at this moment nothing to do, the fortunes of a young lady engrossing us rather more than the fortunes of a kingdom.

There was an unusual shadow on Isoline's beautiful face, which seemed to express an inward struggle, as unusual as its index on her brow. She was sitting on a low embroidered cushion, resting her elbow on her knee, her cheek upon her hand, her luxuriant hair somewhat less carefully arranged than usual, falling as drapery on her shoulders; the king, seated on a couch near her, had laid his hand caressingly on her shoulder,

and seemed half-soothing, half-commanding. All their converse it is unnecessary to repeat; we will take up the thread which is woven with the future events of our tale.

"I looked to thee to give me courage to resist this unlooked-for tyranny of my father, and thou givest him thy support," resumed Isoline, without heeding the king's previous remark, and lifting up her face to his, gleaming sadly pale amid her raven curls. "Why must I marry? of what great importance is this poor hand, that it may not rest quietly in my own possession as I desire? Would to heaven I were a poor maiden of my native mountains, free to wed or remain single, as my heart might prompt."

"Truly, I think a mountain maid's estate would scarcely suit thee, Isoline," replied the king, smiling; "thou lovest state and power as the best of us."

"'Tis because I love power that I love not to resign it. Oh, my liege, why do me such wrong as to compel marriage? why may I not remain unwed?"

"Isoline," replied the king, seriously, "I pledged myself to thy father to reiterate his command, because it is mine own. Thou knowest, to behold thee the wife of Douglas has been for seven years my dearest wish; I can consent to its delay no longer. I will not have his happiness thus trifled with, the best years of his manhood wasted in the pursuit of devotion to a wilful girl, who is scarce worthy of him. Aye, look proud as thou wilt, fair niece, thy continued perverseness compels me to be thus harsh. What is there thou canst bring forward against the husband of thy sovereign's choice, thy father's wishes? Come, sum up the charge against him, that we may judge if in truth its foundation have some reason."

Isoline was silent.

"Doth he possess one single evil quality which can create unhappiness for a wife, abhorrence against himself? Speak with thy wonted candor, Isoline. Knowest thou aught against him, one evil quality which thou canst bring forward in his dispraise?"

"No," was the reply, in clear frank tones.

"Is there aught in his person or his countenance which your woman's fancy doth so dispraise as to affect your happiness?"

Another "No."

"Has his public or private conduct evinced any other spirit

than that of a true knight and patriot, faithful to Scotland as to me?"

Again she answered "No."

"Has his pursuit of your fastidious ladyship been conducted other than most nobly and most honorably?"

"No."

"Notwithstanding all this, canst thou say then thou dost positively dislike him?"

"My liege, no."

"Then what, in St. Andrew's name, can either thou or I desire more?" exclaimed King Robert, with some natural impatience. "Isoline, there can be but one cause for this positive rejection of a noble chevalier, against whom thou canst bring no other cause than that, forsooth, thou feelest for him no romantic love. Thou hast given that little wilful heart unto some other; deny it not, for wherefore shouldst thou? An he be of birth and bearing, noble and faithful, and open as James of Douglas, I will forswear even my dearest wishes, and make thee his. Now wherefore weep, foolish girl?—dost thou so doubt thine uncle—do these words surprise thee? Speak out, give me the secrets of thy heart; an thou lovest one worthy of thee, and who loves thee so well as Douglas, I will urge no more against thy wishes—I would not give my Douglas, nor would he accept, a divided or preoccupied heart; but an thy refusal proceed from nothing more than girlish wilfulness and caprice, and love of universal dominion, my own hand shall conduct thee to the altar, and compel thee to become my faithful Douglas's bride."

The young lady was silent for many minutes after this speech; she had bent down her head so that the workings of her expressive features were completely concealed by her veiling hair; there was a wild tumult within she could scarce define, and certainly not control. Avow she refused Douglas because she loved another, and that other had given no cause for love, breathed not one word—save what she deemed chivalric gallantry—to say it was returned, nay, more had given her cause again and yet again to believe his affections were engaged; from whose lips she had even distinguished words of impassioned love, addressed to one indeed incapable of returning it, but still its hearer, thus mystifying his conduct more and more—avow this, lower herself thus, when every day brought

its chance of proving how vainly, fruitlessly, disgracefully to her own proud spirit, she had loved—Isoline, do this, the haughty, independent Isoline—no, no, better her heart should break, her hand be pledged unto another, than expose herself to this Yet there was a struggle, a bitter struggle, for despite her pride, she *loved;* and wilfully to throw aside the offer of her king, reject her own happiness, was it well—was it wise? Yet whom did she love—would he reach the standard of perfection King Robert named—who could say his birth was noble? she could not speak his name.

"My liege," at length she said, composedly, though in a somewhat lowered voice, "I were indeed an ingrate to refuse acquiescence to your grace's will, thus kindly and generously offered; but a woman's heart, my liege, bears not the scrutiny of man. Bear with me a few weeks longer, give me at least the chance of other noble maidens, the choice of husbands. There are many noble and gallant youths in your grace's camp, desirous as Douglas for this hand, all worthless as it is; why should I do them the injustice of refusing them for one I love not better, though I grant him noblest, most deserving? Let some extraordinary deed of valor in the forthcoming strife win my hand and give me a husband; all then have equal chance hardly, for James of Douglas, an he loves me as he saith, will bear down all opposition to obtain me, and I do therefore accede to your grace's wishes, even while I seem to waive them."

"'Tis scarcely justice, Isoline; he loves thee above all the others."

"How *know* I that, my liege? let him prove it, and without a question I will be his."

"But chance, fortune, the most untoward fates, may give thee to one far beneath thy rank."

"Not so, my liege; thou thyself shall mark the boundaries of birth and station—'tis a trial of love, not ambition. I speak but to those who pretend to value above all price my maiden hand, and let those only essay for it. Surely thou wilt not refuse me this, my royal uncle. Thou hast offered more to thy poor Isoline; she asks but this one more trial of Douglas's love, and if truth he gain it, I pledge thee mine honor I will fulfil your grace's dearest wish—I will be the bride of Douglas."

"Then be it so, fair lady. Woman-like thou wouldst mark

the extent of thy power, know thine influence on men's hearts, ere thou vowest thyself to one. Well, well, I will not thwart thee. Thou canst demand no proof of valor Douglas will not win; and perchance he would glory more in thus obtaining thee, in thus proving his devotion, than in winning thee in peace. It shall be as thou wilt. But when proclaim thy purpose—when give him this bright hope?"

"When the vast armies of which we hear so much appear, and we may judge what deeds of valor for our countrymen their ranks present. The evening of the day that marks them within sight shall hear this resolve. The day that sees the banner of England dashed down from Stirling Castle, the flag of Scotland there upraised, the English armies scattered like dissolving snow back to their native mountains, and Scotland wholly, firmly, gloriously free—that day shall see me betrothed to Douglas, an he win me, or to him that doth."

"I may not quarrel with thee, Isoline, for thy spirit is but too akin to mine," replied the king, gazing admiringly on the noble form of his niece, as she raised herself from her cushion, and stood loftily erect, every feature kindling with the enthusiasm of her soul. "Truly thou art a child of Scotland, inheriting thy mother's blood, and deserveth that which thou demandest. I accept thy pledge. My victory shall hail thee Lady Douglas, sweet one, and make thee dearer still;" he threw his arm round her, kissed her brow, and left her. Isoline remained standing.

"Lady Douglas," she repeated, folding her hands upon her throbbing heart; "did I think so, dream so, better to have died. Have I indeed fooled away my happiness, cast it on a stake, certain ere 'tis tried? Yet, no, this will solve the dark and painful mystery. If he love me—he, the unknown, the nameless, the sworn—if he be free to love, will he not give me this proof—will he let Douglas win me—permit aught superior in valor to conquer him? Never! I have watched him: he is brave, dauntless, valorous as the young lion chafed into wrath; gentle, prudent. Oh, no, no; gallant, irresistible as is the Lord of Douglas, if Amiot love me, be free to love, he will win me still, and if not, if my heart break, what matters? But it shall not; no, he shall not dream my weakness, he shall not dare to think I was mad enough to love;" and she pressed her hands convulsively together, compressed that beautiful lip, under a

passion of feeling which would have laid weaker natures prostrate in the dust. What passed in that woman's heart from the hour of that resolution until the moment of bringing it to proof we may not pretend to define; Isoline's character is now known to our readers, and her thoughts and feelings must be imagined accordingly.

On leaving Isoline, the king turned to the apartment of Agnes, who had also taken up her abode in the Convent of St. Ninian: the change from perfect unconsciousness to approaching sanity was becoming more and more apparent with every passing month; but, though equally certain, the waning of that fragile form was almost unperceived. She was standing looking forth from the open casement on the broad champaign it overlooked. He approached gently, but she heard his step, and turned towards him with a smile that *thrilled,* for its source seemed deeper than the lip.

"I look for England, gentle Robert," she said, yielding to his paternal embrace, and laying both hands on his, "but she comes not yet. Alas! that rude feet and ruder spirits should stain yon beautiful plain!"

"Yet wouldst thou not Scotland should be free?" inquired the king, startled by her words into the expectation of a collected reply. "Dearest, were Stirling ours, not a rood of earth, much less a walled and guarded castle, can our former tyrants claim."

"Free! King of Scotland, thou shalt be free, aye, thou and thy country! Said *he not* it would be, and did ever *his* words fail? But do not let us talk of these things; my poor brain reels again, and, oh, it is such pain to wake when these wild fancies gain dominion. I will not speak thus, I will not—no, Robert, gentle Robert; bear with me, it will pass—I shall soon be well."

She laid her head on his bosom, and he felt her tremble in his arms. He did not speak, but clasped her yet closer, yet more caressingly to his bosom, and the threatened suffering passed.

"Is it in truth memory that maketh me thus?" she asked, sorrowfully. "There is some change upon me; life is not all present. Sometimes my soul looks back, and it is either one dark blank, or peopled with such a dream of horror, I could cry aloud from very agony!"

"Has that dream form, mine Agnes?" inquired the king, cautiously, yet anxiously.

"Sometimes I think it hath. I seem pressed and hurried to and fro by a dark, shapeless crowd, struggling to escape some scene of horror; my eyes fix themselves on one I have seen but in air, one that was never upon earth; and, oh, merciful heaven, how do I see him!" she shuddered beneath the word. "But how can it be? it cannot be what men term memory, for that, they say, is of things which *have* been, and he, my beautiful, he never came to earth to suffer this; and then I see him not in air so often, though I *feel* him nearer yet, and there comes too a voice, bidding me prepare to join him. He will call me soon, oh, soon; he but tries my love till then. When Scotland is free, and thou art the king, he said, oh, he will call me to his heart, and we shall fly up together above all sound, all sight of earth: thou wilt not need him then."

The king could not reply, but his countenance betrayed the emotion her words produced.

"Thou wilt miss me, king, as men call thee. Oh, there are times when I feel as if I did not pay thee the respect thy due, the homage paid by all else, and it seemeth as if the full meaning of king came to me, and I could kneel and reverence as others; but when I look upon thee, words my lips have framed depart, and Agnes only feels she loves thee, Robert."

"And only feel this, sweet one," fervently answered the king; "leave to others the homage of the knee. Enough, oh, 'tis a blessed enough, afflicted as thou art, to feel thou, whom he so loved, so cherished, canst still feel love for me."

Some time longer the king lingered with her; there was something about her words and aspect now that linked her yet closer to his manly heart, spoke yet more forcibly unto his love, and despite the dim prophesyings of her clouded spirit, he never left her without feeling hope strong within him that she would wake from those twilights of her mind, and bless him with intellectual beauty still.

Nearer and nearer yet rolled over the whole south of Scotland the immense armament collected by Edward of England, or rather by the great vassals of his crown, for the relief of Stirling, or the redeeming of Sir Philip de Mowbray's pledge. Even as King Robert's penetration had declared, the remonstrances of his nobles had at length roused Edward to a sense

of his long neglect of Scotland, to a sudden resolve to awake the might of his kingdom to regain her. The shout of war rang through the land; the last remnant of the first Edward's extensive conquests hovered on the chance of a single fight; its recovery opened anew a path of victory to England; its downfall placed the seal on Scottish freedom, pronounced her independent, glorious in the scale of kingdoms. The visit of Mowbray to court, the intelligence he brought, the sudden excitement of his nobles, aroused Edward from his dream of luxurious effeminacy to all the spirit and bravery of his father's son. He was not naturally a coward, and the exertions he now made somewhat lessened the scornful contempt with which he had been regarded by his barons. England, Wales, Ireland, even France, issued their warriors, the very flower of chivalry. No less than ninety-three great vassals of the crown brought out their whole feudal force of cavalry, consisting of forty thousand, every horse and every rider sheathed in mail; twenty-seven thousand infantry were levied in England and Wales alone, and when collected at Berwick, within ten days of the appointed time, the whole army amounted to the almost incredible number of one hundred thousand. A spirit of excitement pervaded every rank. Robert the Bruce had proved himself no unworthy opponent for the bravest knights in Christendom.

The war was deprived of that brutal ferocity which had characterized the actions of the first Edward. Men marched northward, simply under the chivalric feeling that a castle was to be rescued—the question of English or Scottish superiority to be decided at a blow. Truly an incentive to gallant cavaliers, and one so powerful, that the youthful Earl of Gloucester forgot this, his first battle, was against the brother-in-arms of his noble, still-lamented father—against the very man a father's lips had taught him to venerate and love.

Gilbert de Clare, that Earl of Gloucester whose conduct as the friend of Robert and the subject of Edward must be familiar to our readers, had been spared the agony of thus marching direct against his cherished friend. He had been cut off in the prime of life, satisfied that his son retained in his noble-minded mother a guardian and a guide, who would well supply his place. And she could not bear to damp the excited spirit of her gallant boy, anticipating with unchecked ardor his first battle, by recalling against whom he was to raise his

maiden sword; but yet she could not part with him, for her spirit was not at rest. Perhaps it was superstition, perhaps folly; but the shade of her departed husband seemed ever hovering around her, with a sad and gloomy brow, and she would have given all she most valued on earth, that her boy's first battle was against other than his father's friend; perhaps, too, there was another cause. Though the daughter of one king of England, the sister of another, her upright spirit ever told her the Bruce's cause was *just*, and her spirit, endowed with pious prescience, felt he would succeed; defeat would attend the arms of England, impossible as it seemed. The most truthful reports did not give Robert more than fifty thousand men, which, as they neared Scotland, dwindled into forty, then to thirty, till many a gallant baron was heard to grieve at the great disparity, declaring the victory they made sure of gaining would scarce be glorious, scarce worth any exertion to obtain. But still foreboding was the heart of the Princess Joan, and urged by those mysterious impulses, which who of us has not in some time or other of his life experienced, she resolved on accompanying her son, on lingering with him to the end; and the young earl rejoiced, for he doted on her, and longed to throw his first laurels at her feet. His was not the age of prescience, save for rosy-colored joy.

To this immense armament of England what had King Robert to oppose? Naught but willing hands and hearts, so nerved with freedom, that they had no dream of aught save victory. For five years victory, glorious victory, had ever crowned the banners of their patriot king, and would she desert him now? No, it was the crisis of their country's fate; England had risen in arms but to feel to her heart's core the power of the free. Day after day beheld fresh reinforcements; men full of fiery valor, impatient to behold the foe, to strike the last link of slavery to the earth, to behold their country free; but yet, despite this patriot zeal, but thirty thousand warriors mustered round King Robert; tried they were in truth, but what were they compared to Edward's hundred thousand?

There was neither doubt nor tremor on King Robert's heart; but he was too good a general not to feel, and keenly, all the disadvantages of such very unequal numbers, and not only inequality of number; compared to Edward's forty thousand cavalry he had literally none, the fugitive warfare he had been

compelled to adopt preventing all approach to the feudal tenure of other kingdoms.

The bow was no instrument to the Scotch, and the unerring English archer formed the greater part of Edward's infantry. These disadvantages would have been all-sufficient to have crushed even the most sanguine hopes, but it was not so with Robert. Difficulty with him did but seem to make him conscious of the unfailing resources of his own mighty mind, and he prepared with perfect coolness to overcome by stratagem what was impossible with force; how he succeeded the sequel will show.

But one advantage Robert possessed over and above his foes. He could choose his ground, and that choice evinced his consummate military skill. Partly open, partly shaded by single or grouping trees, the New Park of Stirling offered a favorable space for the arrangement of his lines. A bog, called New Miln Bog, stretched between the Scottish battle-ground and the advance of the English. The brook from which this celebrated engagement took its name ran foaming and rushing between precipitous crags to the eastward, presenting an impregnable defence to the forces stationed near. Opposite to this was an extensive field of brushwood, offering, in *appearance*, an admirable ground for the operations of the cavalry, but in reality so excavated with rows of deep pits, as to give the earth the semblance of an immense honeycomb, and threatening complete destruction to the English cavalry. Westward rose an eminence commanding a complete bird's-eye view of the whole plain, and divided into several craggy summits, one of which, rising just above the Convent of St. Ninian, and divided thence by a thick wood, looked also over Stirling. The convent itself and church adjoining lay directly in the path to the castle, and there were perhaps some amongst the sisters not a little timorous of their vicinity to a spot likely to be fiercely contested; by the one party, to throw succors into Stirling, and by the other to prevent it. The crag before mentioned commanded this path likewise, and on its giddy summit the beautiful form of Isoline Campbell was more than once perceived watching the progress of the English army, with an excitement as great as any of the youthful knights in her uncle's camp.

The evening of the 22d of June found a gallant assemblage

of knights and nobles in King Robert's pavilion. Lord James of Douglas and Sir Robert Keith, Lord Marshal of Scotland, had been dispatched that morning, by King Robert's orders, to survey the rapidly approaching English army; they had just returned, full of animation and excitement, which was speedily shared by their companions. The Lady Isoline and some of her attendant maidens were also present, and perhaps that circumstance increased the ardor of Lord James's words and sparkling vivacity of mien.

"How, say you, look these gallant Englishmen?" inquired the lady, perceiving the conference between the king and his officers was over. "Fain would I list the tale from thy lips, my Lord of Douglas, for truly rumor doth speak such marvels my poor brain can hardly credit them."

"And for once rumor speaketh but the truth, believe me, lady," he replied, eagerly. "Scotland hath never seen a sight like this, even in her fairy dreams; beautiful and terrible to behold—appalling, while it fascinates."

"Appalling to James of Douglas?" interposed Isoline, with a smile.

"Nay, I speak figuratively, lady. Imagine a glorious array of moving warriors for a space of five square miles, the sun reflected from moving steel, dazzling the eye with one blaze of gold and silver on man and horse, so closely wedged they but seem one mass of gorgeous metal, whose ranks no glance can penetrate, no eye can reckon. Troop after troop roll on like the waves of a mighty ocean dyed in the sun's rays with every brilliant tint, on like a whelming deluge; over hill, and wood, and plain, lances flash against the summer sky, a very wood of steel; bills and bows from thousands of infantry mingle with the knightlier ranks in terrible array, and threaten devastation. Oh, 'twas a goodly, glorious sight! one that stirred the very blood within me, and bade my hand fly to my sword, as scarcely able to restrain it in its sheath."

"What! thou wouldst single-handed have encountered such a force, my lord? Truly, that were wise!"

"Lady, to have defined or tempered that moment's excitement was wholly vain; the very sight roused me out of my quieter self, till verily, I was scarce accountable for any mad deed I might have done."

"Methinks, then, it was well for my uncle the king that Sir Robert Keith was near thee."

"He! why the sight stirred his blood even as it did mine. Believe me, lady, his soberer age rendered him no whit calmer than myself."

"He speaks truth, lady, strange though it seem," continued Sir Robert, smiling.

"And King Edward—saw you the king?" asked many voices.

"We could only give a shrewd guess as to his position," replied Lord Douglas, "by the phalanx of gorgeously-clad knights, with all the magnificent banners of the great crown vassals, forming almost a canopy of rainbows; and chargers—ha! many of them shall become Scotland's ere long; and the best and noblest shall be trained for thy use, sweet lady, an thou wouldst honor Douglas by such charge," he added, in a lower, more impassioned voice.

"Standards, ye have not named standards; are they numerous and gorgeous, as fitting the rest of this armament?" demanded Sir Walter Fitz-Alan ere Isoline gave reply.

"Aye, by my father's sword! such standards as will adorn Scotland's palace walls for many a long year, and each one with its knightly guard, till they seemed to rise from towers of gold or steel. The great banners of St. George, St. Edmund, St. Edward. The standard of every noble house of England, and pennons, streamers, penconelles, of colors glowing as the hues of sunset, displaying pearls, and gems, and riches, which seemed emulous to arrest the sun's beams ere they rested on coats of mail."

"And each guarded, sayest thou?" inquired Isoline, earnestly.

"Aye, and will be on the battle-field. The capture of St. Edmund and St. Edward were almost a deadlier blow to England than the downfall of her army. Ah, lady, wouldst thou but speak the word, wouldst give me but the promise of one answering smile, one approving word, one hope that knightly valor might gain me the hand for which the devotion of a whole life were but poor return, how gladly would I penetrate the thickest ranks, the most impenetrable phalanx of England's noblest sons, to lay that banner at thy feet."

"Wouldst thou indeed do this, my Lord of Douglas?" sud-

denly interposed King Robert, who had neared his niece's seat. "Methinks, then, my gentle Isoline, this were the fitting moment for the proclamation of thy will, and nerve our gallant knights with double valor for the onset. What sayest thou, sweet one? Have I thy consent to speak?"

A deep flush mantled the cheek of Isoline for a single instant, and then faded into deadly paleness, but she bent her head in sign of affirmative, and the king continued, in his clear, manly voice, turning the attention of every one within the tent even from the one engrossing subject.

"Young lords and knights of Scotland,' he said, "all ye whose birth is noble, whose ancestry is loyal, whose knightly valor hath proved ye worthy of such brave descent, and who bear on your shields naught that can tarnish nobility or present a barrier to a union with a daughter of the Bruce—in a word, ye amongst those who have any pretensions to the hand of the Lady Isoline Campbell, by that true, faithful, and chivalric love which should ever mark the devotion of a chevalier of high degree to a noble maiden, in all things worthy of that love, stand forth, and list the resolve which, as a true and patriotic daughter of Scotland, she, through us, her liege and loving sire, proclaims."

Amazed, yet bearing on their frank, open countenances such unequivocal marks of delight, of hope, that none could doubt their sentiments, no less than seven young noblemen, of the first families of Scotland, sprung forward from different sides of the tent, forming a close semicircle before the king and the lady, at whose feet Douglas was already kneeling, looking up in her face with such an expression of respectful, yet devoted attachment, that that heart must indeed have been preoccupied to resist it; but that heart had sunk back upon itself as impelled by a weight of lead. Were these *all*, *all* who, by manner, nay, by word, had evinced pretensions to her hand? her eye for a moment glanced almost wildly round. Was he whom it sought within that tent, and yet made no step forward even at such a call? What did it proclaim? Every knight and noble had gathered closely round the principal group, eager and wondering to list what followed; the words of the king passed like light from mouth to mouth. A martial form darkened the opening of the tent, from which the heat of the night had caused the curtains to be drawn aside. It was Sir Amiot; she

saw him bend forward in earnest inquiry, followed by a quick, almost convulsive start—a glance met hers, but that was all; she saw him fold his arms in his cloak, and remaining shrouded in the folds of the curtain, his eyes, she felt fixed on her, but making no forward movement to take his station midst those hoping few. She forgot at that moment of deep agony one clause in her uncle's words, or perhaps had never dreamed that aught, in one so faithful to his country and his king, could tarnish his ancestral shield, and place a barrier between him and a Bruce. Perhaps it was well for her no such feeling came to prevent her awakened pride; naught but pride, the haughty, icy pride of a soul such as hers could have sustained her at such a moment, strengthened her for the trial she had brought upon herself. Almost crushed beneath the intolerable agony of that moment—the belief she had been weak enough to love, and that love was unreturned—she arose calm, collected, a flush upon her cheek, in truth—but what was that but maiden modesty?—her beautiful eye flashed, her rich voice faltered not one shadow in its deep, full tones.

"My gracious liege," she said, "the love, the devotion, these noble lords have in all sincerity, at divers times, breathed into mine ear, demand my grateful thanks, and will, I trust, banish all unmaidenly freedom from my words; I have to each and all returned the same reply—the impossibility of love like theirs—the love of power and freedom, which now mine own, I wished not to surrender. My lords, I pretend not to deny the first of these is still my own; the second I am willing to resign, an love be so great for me, that not alone will its bearer be content to receive me as I am, with no pretence of deeper feeling than sincere regard and willing word to seek the happiness of him alone who wins me; that he will adventure, in the great battle about to join, a deed of valor worthy of his own high merits and the lady whom he seeks. My lords, there are fearful odds against us. England cometh with her mighty bands as if to crush this mountain land, and by her whelming weight, ere a single blow be struck; yet do I—a child of the Campbell and the Bruce, a daughter of Scotland—avow my firm belief that not only will victory be ours, but glory more transcendent than hath yet beamed over Scotland—glory, from the king to the peasant, the noble to the serf. Believing this, then, I fear not, even in a battle on which the freedom of this

land depends, to hazard my fate to a feat of arms, more befitting, perchance, the tournay's sport than the terrible strife for life or death. The knight who lays St. Edmund's banner at my feet shall have my hand, and all of heart 'tis mine to give, my true and faithful service for the time to come."

A burst of irrepressible gladness broke from one and all of those most nearly interested, echoed by a heartfelt cheer of applause from those around. James of Douglas paused but to press the hand of the lady passionately to his lips, and then sprung up with a loud, exulting cry of joy, not even her presence could restrain.

"Mine, mine!" he cried. "When hath Douglas failed? and shall he now—now, with such a prize before him? Lady, sweet lady, I will lay St. Edmund's banner at thy feet, or bid farewell to life!"

"And the prayers of thy sovereign go with thee, my Douglas," whispered the king, as he grasped the young warrior's hand, drawing him from the group, while, one by one, the youthful candidates for that glorious prize bent the knee before the lady, and pressed the kiss of acknowledgment and gratitude upon her hand; and came not *he* amongst them? He had departed from the tent; and did she need him? what cared she for the love of an unknown, when the devotedness of the noblest, the best lay offered at her feet? She tarried a brief while longer, returning with graceful courtesy, unfailing dignity, the many compliments of those around, and then rose to depart, refusing the escort of her devoted cavaliers; but with a kindness of tone and manner that excited love yet more, bade them farewell till the eventful strife was over, bidding them not for very wilfulness tempt life—that but one only might win, but for all she would retain regard and friendship, if as another's wife they wished it still.

The Lady Isoline walked slowly from the pavilion to the convent. A guard of honor ever attended her to and fro; but this night so irksome was their presence, she longed to burst away, and seek solitude and peace. Yet still she lingered on her brief way, as if seeking the mental pride and strength which with every step from the eye of man gave way. One moment she paused ere entering the woody alcove which led to the convent-gate; she had dismissed the guard, and sent forward her attendants, struggling for composure ere she met the inquiring

gaze of the abbess and the sisters. Alas for the continuance of that calm! the figure of a knight suddenly stepped from the deep shade and knelt before her.

"One moment, one little moment, gracious lady; oh, do not refuse it!" he exclaimed, the deep, impassioned accents of that well-known voice betraying in a single instant how utterly fallacious was her dream of pride. "I will not tell thee all I have endured, all the deep agony the words of the king have caused. I might not join the noble few whose shields, whose ancestral names bore no stain, no shade to sully their personal fame, and yet, perchance, when this dark veil be removed, for the sake of one valued by the king, even this might be forgiven, and thy precious hand not all forbidden me. Lady, not one of those who knelt before thee, vowing homage, love, that would bid them rush on death to win thee, can give thee a more devoted heart than Amiot's. Look not on me thus upbraidingly, thus doubtingly; a brief interval, and all, all shall be explained, trust me but till then; till, in my own proper person, my own unshrouded name, I lay the banner of St. Edmund at thy feet, or die. Speak, dear lady, but one word, give me but one sign to breathe approval, to permit my struggling with this gallant band: say but that, an I win St. Edmund's banner, the precious prize shall be mine own, and even Douglas's self shall quail before me; in the face of England and of Scotland, Amiot—the nameless, lonely Amiot—through death itself, shall win thee. Speak, speak, in pity; oh! might I breathe the love, the mighty love I bear, have borne thee, since first that smile of pitying kindness beamed like reviving dew upon my scathed and lonely heart, 'twould weigh, perchance, against the mystery around me—a few brief days will solve it. The impending strife, on which so much depends, gives me a name, dissolves this dark and hated veil, gives her to freedom whose hand unmasks my brow, fulfils the vow of years. Lady, sweet Lady Isoline, trust me but a brief while; say that I, too, may seek a prize, dearer, how much, than life!"

Isoline heard, and her limbs so trembled during this wild appeal that she was fain, foolish as it was, to lean against a stalwart oak for support. The revulsion of feeling, the sudden upspringing of that drooping heart, casting aside the leaden chains which one moment before had bent it down to earth, as by a sudden flash of dazzling radiance, dissolving them to

naught, was more than even her spirit could control. Where now was the calm and dignified courtesy with which she had answered the impassioned Douglas? Did she now promise "all of heart she had to give?" we know not the exact import of her words, we only know there was something of a struggle with herself, less successful in controlling impulses than usual; that something must have breathed from her actions or in the music of her whispered tones, certainly more than the maiden meant, that it could have emboldened Sir Amiot to an act which Douglas had not dared, to pass his arm round that lovely form, which yielded to his support, bend down his head, as to impress his quivering lips upon that pure and spotless brow, then suddenly pause, with the impassioned exclamation—

"No, not till my name be told—not till in the face of the whole world I may claim thee mine! I will not seal our compact thus; not one blush of pain shall stain thy cheek. Enough thy voice hath granted my boon—hath spoken words to lie on my heart of hearts, too blessed, too precious e'en for the winds of heaven to list, lest their faintest echo pass from me. If love may win, in the face of heaven I'll claim thee, sweet one! oh, trust me to the end." He caught both her hands, pressed them again and again to his lips and heart, and vanished.

"Trust thee, aye, did an angel of heaven swear that thou wert false!" burst from Isoline's lips, in a tone of such thrilling, cloudless joyance, she well-nigh started at its sound herself, so strangely did it clash with the whelming despondency she had lingered on that spot to conquer but a few brief moments before. Had flowers sprung up around her, or whence came those now laughing in the moonlight? What were those glistening lights on the emerald shrubs, the thousand stars in the deep blue heavens? Surely they had not been there before, for as she walked from the royal tent, the air had felt oppressive, and naught but cloudy mists were round her. She looked round one brief minute, but Nature's self, all laughing as she was, seemed tame to the welling flood of gladness that had sprung up within her own heart, and she darted past with a step so light, it skimmed, not touched the turf, impatient still for solitude; not to school that spirit to haughtiness and pride, but to give its full tide of love and gladness vent. What cared

she for mystery more? enough that he had spoken—and she trusted, for she loved.

On nearing the king's pavilion, which, for the purpose of calming his excited spirit, Sir Amiot had made a long circuit to avoid, eager voices met his ear, and hasty steps, proclaiming that the monarch's guests were severally departing to their quarters. He was greeted with unusual animation, and so many spoke at once, he found some difficulty in comprehending them; at length Edward Bruce's voice made itself intelligible.

"Peace, madcaps!" he shouted, authoritatively; "let this *chevalier solitaire* know what more has chanced; somewhat, methinks, yet more interesting to him than all of you together. What, Sir Amiot, has kept thee aloof from the pavilion? The king is not best pleased; but I have not forgotten thee. Didst hear the Lady Isoline's proposal? 'Tis a brave girl! 'tis as good as accepting James of Douglas at once; he will win her, without a rival. Didst hear all this?"

Sir Amiot bowed in the affirmative.

"Then what, in St. Andrew's name, didst thou leave us for? Afterwards, some bold youngster besought the king's permission to achieve a feat of equal daring, for the privilege of planting the Scottish banner on Stirling Tower, hurling down its rival, and giving liberty to all the prisoners there enthralled. Think of that, Sir Amiot. Thou shalt accomplish thy vow to the very letter; give thy fair incognita freedom with thine own good sword, and dash that hated mask from thy face, as a good knight should. By heaven, I was only sorry the proposal did not come first from me; but I supported it, believe me, with all my eloquence, thinking but of thee, and there thou standest, motionless as an inanimate piece of ice, without even saying gramercy for the thought. What ails thee, man?"

"Pardon me, my lord, but I—I hardly understand thee," replied the knight, gasping for breath, conscious only that some dreadful thunder-cloud was hovering over, to burst and crush the bright hopes of the moment before, and in that consciousness absolutely losing all comprehension of Lord Edward's words. "I—I have been—nay, my lord, pardon me, my brain is giddy; I pray you speak again."

"Why, truly, that is not thine own voice, Amiot," resumed the Bruce, softened at once into kindness, and hurrying to the side of the knight, he drew his arm kindly within his own.

"What has chanced? Cheer up, dear friend; my news will give thee new life. Thou knowest these English barons never march to a battle, such as this will be, without the sacred standards of St. Edmund and St. Edward in addition to the grand national banner of St. George. They imagine that no defeat can attend them while beneath these banners, and that taken they never can be. By God's help, we will tell them a different tale. Isoline has chosen St. Edmund's for her own especial prize, and has resolved whoever brings the banner of St. Edward to King Robert shall place the flag of Scotland on the ramparts of Stirling, give life and liberty to every Scottish prisoner, and conduct them with all honor and chivalry to their deliverer's feet. Gain thou this banner, and this privilege is thine —the vow of years fulfilled."

"And where, in what position is placed St. Edward's banner?" demanded Sir Amiot, in a tone scarcely intelligible, "near St. Edmund's? may they not both be gained?"

"Both!—art stark mad! what canst thou mean? Nigh together! why where is thy wonted generalship? No, no, these magnificent English barons are somewhat better generals than that; they place one in the left flank, and one in the right, that the tug of war may be equal—St. George's national standard thus doubly guarded. God's mercy, Amiot, what doth ail thee? thou art white and ghastly as yonder moonbeam on the water, and thy voice sounds hollow, as if some evil spirit had possession of thee."

"I will go exorcise him, good my lord; give you good night," wildly exclaimed the unfortunate knight, breaking from Lord Edward's hold, and darting away in the direction of his tent, with a speed, a suddenness, startling his companions into the conviction his senses were disordered.

"Better not follow him, my lords, he will recover himself anon," interposed Malcolm, who, as usual, was at hand whenever his master, either present or absent, most needed him and who did him essential service at that moment, by preventing the kindly intent of the Bruce and others to follow and relieve him. He, however, tarried not, save to see his advice was followed; but the first glance at his master convinced him that not even his presence could aid him now.

"To know thou lovest, and to lose thee thus!" burst at intervals from Sir Amiot's parched lips, as with fevered and ir-

regular strides he paced the tent; "to see others win thee without the power of striking one blow in proof of that deep affection I do bear thee. Merciful heaven, must this be—am I bound to do this? Is not her freedom gained without it—my vow fulfilled? What have I sworn—what, Holy Virgin, called on thee to register in heaven? To seek her liberty, life, joy, above all things on earth; to sacrifice all of self, of selfish happiness for her who so loved me; to let naught interfere with this one grand object of my life, at the sword's point, through fire, through water, through every horrible shape of death, to give her freedom, if only thus it could be gained; and do I pause now—permit even a thought of others to win a privilege, that were there not another yet more precious, I had moved heaven and earth to gain? More precious, mother of mercy! is there, should there be aught more precious to a son than the life, the liberty of a much injured, devoted, glorious mother? Shall I see others tamely win thee, content that this victory will give thee freedom? Shall I not be perjured, dishonored as a knight, ingrate, rebellious, lost to all affection, every duty as a son? I will not, I cannot, Mother. I will gain thy freedom; I will win the power of flinging open thy prison-gates, casting off the chains, which for eight long weary years thou hast worn in misery; I will do this, though it cost me more than life! Isoline, Isoline, oh God, *must* I lose thee?"

He flung himself on the ground, and writhed in the wild agony of that last thought. The cold, measuring judgment of the present day can form little idea of the mighty agony, the whelming bitterness of that trial; the power, the weight of the chain which the vows of chivalry threw around their subjects. The freedom of the Countess of Buchan was certain, whoever gained the recompense offered by the chivalric king; but her son would have stood perjured and dishonored in the sight of men, as in his own heart, had he permitted aught of personal consideration to permit that recompense being awarded to other than himself. Malcolm knew this well, and therefore he stood silent, full of sympathy, but proffering no word, for what could he advise?

At length Sir Amiot, as though a light had burst upon his soul, sprung from the ground in an ecstasy of renewed hope.

"And why may I not win her still?" he exclaimed. "Were the standards on opposite sides of the broad earth, or the one

in heaven, the other in hell, I will win them both! Mother—Isoline—I will win both—both; ye shall both be mine!"

On, on came the mighty armament of England. Early on the morning of the 23d, intelligence was brought King Robert of their march from Falkirk, and, without a moment's delay, the patriot sovereign drew forth his rejoicing troops, to form them in the line of battle on which he had resolved. The drums rolled to arms; the silver clarions and deeper trumpets echoed and re-echoed from various sides, and under each the gallant soldiery sprung up around their respective leaders. Torwood seemed suddenly awake with animated life; from every glade, from every nook they issued; till they stood in presence of their sovereign in three compact and steady lines. Mounted on a small but strong-built pony, in complete armor, distinguished, alike by friend and foe, by a rich coronet of chased gold around his helmet, whose vizor was up, and his noble and eloquent countenance shaded only by long, waving ostrich plumes of snowy whiteness, the Bruce returned, with grave and graceful dignity, the salutations of the troops, as they passed him to their ranks. He rode slowly along the line once and again, and then he paused, and a deep, breathless stillness for a brief minute prevailed. It was broken by his voice, clear, sonorous, rich, distinguished for many paces round.

"Men of Scotland," he said, "we stand here on the eve of a mighty struggle. Slavery or freedom are in the balance; misery or joy hinge on the result. I hesitate not to avow there are odds, fearful odds against us. England hath more than treble our number; but, soldiers, your monarch fears not—the fewer men, the greater glory! We shall win, we shall give freedom to our country, fling from us her last chain, crushed to atoms, into dust; and to do this, what do we need?—bold hearts and willing hands, and those who have them not, let them now depart. Friends, subjects, fellow-soldiers, if there be any amongst ye whose hearts fail them, who waver in their determination to conquer or die with Robert Bruce, I give ye liberty, perfect liberty to depart hence. Our hearts are not all cast in the same mould, and if there be any excuse for wavering spirits, men of Scotland, behold it in the whelming flood that England's power hath gathered to appal us. Be this proclaimed; I would not one hand should stay whose heart hath failed."

The king paused, and on the instant above a dozen trumpets sounded, followed by the proclamation of the words of the Bruce. His eagle eye flashed as it glanced on that patriot band, and well was its trust fulfilled. Scarce had the echoing trumpets ceased to reverberate, the stentorian tones of the heralds hushed, when the wild cry of confidence, of love, of fidelity to death, burst from every lip, so loud in heartfelt enthusiasm, its echo startled the myriads of Edward with its sound.

"To the death, to the death, we will abide with thee!—thy fate is ours, whatever it may be—victory or death—we will share it! Death hath no terror when thou art by! Victory shall be ours, for 'tis the Bruce that leads; with thee we live or die!"

So shouted the warriors of Scotland; the meanest soldier caught the words, and echoed and re-echoed them with such tones of fervor, trust, and loyal love, the Bruce thrilled and softened, even at that moment, almost to woman's weakness: rank, order, military discipline, all were for the time forgotten. In the centre of his soldiers, the Bruce permitted their excited feelings full vent; they hailed him sovereign, friend, and father—besought his blessing, and answered it by reiterated blessings on himself. A few minutes, seeming almost hours so intense was the excitement, this lasted, and then, as by magic—calmed, silent, disciplined as before—they fell into their ranks, and waited the orders of their king. Three oblong columns, armed with long stout lances, in equal front, formed his first line. To his brother Edward was intrusted the right wing; James of Douglas and Sir Walter Fitz-Alan, High Steward of Scotland, headed the left; and Randolph, now Earl of Moray, the centre. Resting on the precipitous banks of the turbid brook of Bannockburn, the approach to the Scottish right wing was completely inaccessible. The left, on the contrary, appeared bare and dangerously open, but was in fact protected by that excavated honeycomb already described, whose destructive powers were further increased by the number of calthrops or spikes, destined to lame the English cavalry, scattered about. These leaders, Randolph in particular, as his central band more completely covered the road to Stirling than either flank, were commanded to prevent all attempt to throw succors within the castle. The king reserved to him-

self the command of the second line, which, forming one columnar mass, consisted of the men of the Isles, under their chief Angus, from first to last devoted to the Bruce, his own personal followers of Carrick, with those of Argyle and Cantire, and a select and gallant body of horse, amongst whom were many of the young aspirants for the two proffered rewards. Their own eager spirits led them to desire posts in the van, but they listened to and believed their king's assurance that he would give them better opportunity for the exercise of their valor than did they join the wings. To James of Douglas, too, a post in this troop had been assigned, Robert disclosing to him his plan with regard to their service more fully than to the others, and acknowledging he feared that, as a general, his attempts to reach the banner might be liable to interruption; but Douglas would not listen to this suggestion.

"I must not listen so to my own interests as to forget those of your highness," he said, with a frank smile; "I will do my duty as commander, and yet find ample time for the feat of a *preux chevalier;* and let my friends yonder rest on the honor of a Douglas. I strive not for St. Edmund's banner, till the signal of your highness gives them equal fortune with myself."

One other charge demanded the Bruce's attention, and then his plan of operations was complete. Every menial follower of the camp and baggage, with the wives and children of the soldiery, amounting altogether to some hundreds, were dispatched to the eminence we have elsewhere named, giving them a view of the engagement, thus removing all the confusion of so large and undisciplined a multitude wholly from the principal actors of the day: a plan proving of infinitely more advantage to the Bruce than, at the time of its formation, he at all imagined.

About four hours after noon, of the same day, the 23d, the vanguard of the English came in sight; standard and pennon, banner and plume, of every shade and gorgeous material, gleamed in the sunshine, as moving pavilions, ere their bearers could be distinguished. The Bruce, riding forward, his lightning glance seeming to rest on every point at once, fancied he perceived a large body of men detaching themselves from the main body of the English, and advancing cautiously through some low, marshy ground in the direction of the castle.

"Ha!" he shouted, in a voice that called the attention of his

leaders at once. "Randolph, Randolph, there is a rose fallen from thy chaplet! See yon cloud of dust and lances; they have passed your ward."

"But gained not the goal," answered Randolph, the red flush of indignation mounting to his cheek; "nor shall they, my liege—though the rose be fallen, its thorn is there. Follow me, men!" and with about fourscore spearmen he dashed onward, halted in the spot the English must pass, and, in that compact circle of three-lined pointed spears—one rank kneeling, the next stooping, the last upright—which Wallace had introduced, awaited the charge of eight hundred horse.

"In heaven's name, my liege, give me permission to go to his assistance!" burst at once from Sir Amiot and Douglas's lips, at the same moment urging their horses full speed to the side of the king. "He is lost; an he have no relief, he must perish. Yonder are more than ten to one. In St. Andrew's name, give the word, and let us forward to his rescue."

"It may not be," replied the Bruce, calmly; "Randolph must pay the penalty of his own folly; I cannot change the order of battle for him." But Douglas and Amiot could not be so turned from their generous purpose; they continued to plead, until a softening of the king's countenance induced them to act as if the words of consent had been extorted from him, and followed by about a hundred men, the knights, side by side, rushed forward to his rescue. Already Clifford's men had charged full speed Randolph's devoted band, but ere their friends had approached within spear's length of the scene of conflict, the English cavalry, unable to penetrate the sharp phalanx presented to them, had fallen back in such complete disorder, as to convince them Randolph needed no rescue; on every side they rolled back—to use the expression of that SCOTT, to whom Scotland owes so much—like a repelled tide, amid whose retreating waves Randolph's men stood like a stubborn rock. Horses, speared and terrified, fell, crushing many a gallant knight beneath them, and effectually barring the onward charge of their companions; while, without the slightest change in rank, position, or steadiness, Randolph's patriot band remained. With a simultaneous movement, Sir Amiot and Douglas checked their chargers. "Gallantly done, Randolph!" they exclaimed, the noble spirit of chivalry predominating even over its rivalry. "He hath won, gloriously

won. Back! he needs us not; to stay would but tarnish his glory," and they returned to their ranks, followed within half an hour by the Earl of Moray and his followers, without the loss of a single man.

"Nobly retrieved, my Randolph!" exclaimed the king, spurring forward his palfrey to meet his nephew. "The rose but drooped, it hath lifted up its head again, blushing with new honors; we hail it as a bright omen of to-morrow." The warrior bent his head to his saddle-bow, his cheek crimsoned with very different emotion to that which had flushed it before, and the shout with which his men answered the king's gratulation gave no token of the exhaustion which for the moment their herculean efforts had produced.

Crestfallen and disappointed, Sir Robert Clifford, with his discomfited troops, returned to the main body. A superb pavilion had already been raised for the accommodation of King Edward, whom the intense heat of the weather and the fatigues of a long march, encountered in full armor, a dress to which the delicate limbs of the monarch were little accustomed, had slightly discomposed; and a gorgeous scene it presented, with its lordly inmates glittering in radiant armor, flowing plumes, and surcoats of thick silk, velvet, and brocade, heavily embroidered in gold and silver, sometimes in gems, with the devices of their wearers. They were all mostly tall, strongly-built frames, well adapted to their martial costumes, with countenances bearing that stamp of innate nobility which the rules of chivalry so fostered and improved; diversified indeed, but, taking them all in all, noble specimens of the nobility of their land. Close by the monarch's side, richly attired, and adorned with gems, was the court minstrel, whom Edward, confident in his victory, had brought with him to celebrate his triumph. Animated converse was passing amidst the nobles, participated sometimes by the king, but more confined to themselves, as their topics, more of war than minstrelsy and the softer dreams of life, accorded little with the monarch's general mood. The curtains of the pavilion were drawn widely back, so that Edward and his nobles had a full view of the field before them, and all the operations of the Scottish army, in the front of which the form of Robert Bruce was plainly to be seen, caracoling on the small horse he rode. Deep in the back shadows of the tent the young Earl of Gloucester was standing by his

mother, sometimes speaking animatedly, but oftener more silent and thoughtful than usual. There was an anxious tearful affection gleaming in the princess's eyes, as they rested on his young and graceful form, showing forth the beauty of its proportions through the exquisitely light and flexible suit of Milan steel which he wore, unencumbered by the usual surcoat which distinguished his companions.

"Wherefore hast thou forsaken the bearings of thy rank, my son?" asked the princess, more to break the silence which had fallen on them than from real curiosity. "Methinks thou art scarce habited as thy father's son."

"Nay, mother, look on this splendid suit of steel, methinks thou wilt scarce find its equal amid my more gorgeously-decked companions," he replied, with a smile; "an thou admirest it not, beshrew me, gentle lady, I shall quarrel with thy taste."

"An thou mightst with justice, Gilbert; but in this, thy first engagement, should not thy noble rank be displayed in the eyes of all men? Think who thou art—Earl Gilbert's son and Edward's nephew."

"The first is all-sufficient, mother," answered the young man, proudly. "I am prouder as Earl Gilbert's son than were I king of England, not his nephew, and for that father's sake I wear not Gloucester's bearings in the fight to-morrow. My father would not; he would shrink in suffering from meeting one he so loved, in deadly strife, as Bruce, though loyalty to Edward compelled him to the field, and men shall not say his son forgot these things."

The Countess of Gloucester looked on her noble boy, as mournfully, yet firmly, he uttered these words, his father's spirit glistening in his eyes, and the tears, which had struggled for vent before, now fairly fell; he bent down and kissed them from her cheek.

"These were not always thy thoughts, my son," she said, when voice returned; "what hath recalled them now?"

"My father's self," replied the young earl, solemnly. "Start not, dearest mother; in truth I did not think enough of him against whom my maiden sword must first be raised, I thought but of the animation, the excitement, the glory we might reap; I thought but of the battle, the delight of giving my sword its longed-for freedom, in the service of my sovereign. But yester-

night, in the visions of deep sleep, I looked again upon my father."

"Was it sleep, my son?" interrupted the countess, her cheek blanched with the intensity of her emotion.

"It might not have been, yet so it seemed, my mother; it was not the thrilling awe with which methinks I should have gazed upon his semblance had it palpably appealed to waking sense. I had slept soundly, it seemed, exhausted by continued marches, when gradually that sleep became less and less deep, as if the folds of unconsciousness in which my soul was wrapt were one by one unturned, and left the immortal spirit bare, and purified for commune with its kindred essence passed above. I knew not where I was; but a shadowy cloud for a brief interval hovered like a silvery mist around me, subsiding gradually into the noble proportions, the majestic figure of my father. I sprung up, I knelt before him, struggling to speak, but without the power, yet it was more intense delight at gazing on his face again than awe. He looked upon me, methought, mournfully, and pressed his hand on my brow; pushing back my hair, as to look more fully on my face, 'Would, would it were not against the Bruce that thou must march, my noble boy,' he said, solemnly and distinctly, 'and yet thy father's spirit will hover round thee even then; raise not thy hand against him, his cause is *blessed*, let not his eye trace thee. My blessing on thee, Gilbert; soon, soon we shall meet again.' Ha! what means this—what is going on there?" continued the young earl, suddenly interrupting himself, roused even from this tale by the sudden animated bustle round the king, and partly, perhaps, with the wish to shake off the emotions of awe creeping over him, partly to give his mother more opportunity to regain the control which had almost deserted her at this painful corroboration of her own dim forebodings; he gently disengaged her almost unconscious pressure of his arm, raised her hand to his lips, and hastened from the tent. "What, in St. George's name, means this?" he demanded. "Where goes Sir Henry de Bohun in this hot haste?"

"Like a loyal subject, to end the war at a single blow," replied Edward, with some animation. "He goes to do a goodly service to England, to us; and the saints speed him."

"Mean you he goes against the Bruce? 'tis shame, foul shame to knighthood, an he doth! it cannot be."

"To the devil with thy squeamishness, Gloucester!" retorted one of the elder barons; "all is fair in a strife like this."

"Fair, armed as he is, and on such a charger, against one alike unprepared to receive him, and on a steed that must fall at his first thrust! Shame, shame on thee! Hereford, Arundel, for the honor of knighthood, prevent this. We are dishonored, a hundred times dishonored, an we let this be," and the young earl darted from the tent, followed by the earls he had named, who, like himself, felt the dishonor of the deed, but an they hoped to prevent Sir Henry's advance, they were too late. Mounted on a superb charger, fresh, and pawing the ground with impatience to spring forward, a tall, powerful, almost gigantic man, armed from head to foot in burnished and gilded armor, his vizor closed, his lance the length and thickness of a young palm, headed with sharp steel, couched for the charge, Sir Henry de Bohun gave his steed the spur, and rushed with such lightning swiftness across the intervening ground against the Bruce, that those who had marked the movement held their very breath in the intensity of anxious suspense. Gloucester, uttering a cry almost of despair, remained arrested in his flying progress, one arm raised, one leg advanced, watching in absolute agony the effect of an encounter he felt to his heart's core must be fatal to the Bruce; his fears were needless. Calm and collected, as if no danger threatened, the King of Scotland sat his palfrey, giving no sign of preparation or even of consciousness of his foe's approach, save that the fiery glance of his eye never wavered from his movements. On came the mighty warrior, on, on; his lance must bear down the patriot king; man and horse must fall together pinioned to the earth—on, on; they near, they meet—no, not meet; the palfrey, faithful to his master's hand, swerved aside. De Bohun, carried on by the impetuosity of his steed, passed the mark, but no further; the terrible battle-axe of the Bruce raised in air, flashing one moment in the sun, then fell, and cloven from his helmet to his throat, the force of the blow shattering the battle-axe into a hundred glittering fragments, Sir Henry de Bohun fell dead to the ground, his terrified charger rushing wildly to the ranks he had but five minutes previous left in pomp and pride.

CHAPTER IX.

There was deep silence on the plain of Bannockburn—silence, as if not a breathing soul were there; yet, when the shrouding drapery of night was drawn aside, when the deep rosy tint of the eastern skies proclaimed the swift advance of the god of day, what a glorious scene was there! Both armies were drawn forth facing each other. The vanguard of the English, composed of the archers and billmen, under command of Gloucester and Hereford, forming an impenetrable mass of above twenty thousand infantry, with a strong body of glittering men-at-arms to support them, occupied the foremost space, directly in the rear, and partly on their right; the remainder of the army, consisting of nine divisions, completely covered and so straitened by the narrow ground on which they stood, as to present the appearance of one immense body, from which, as they slowly rolled forward towards the Scots, the rays of the morning sun played so dazzlingly on the gleaming armor, the unsheathed steel, the glittering spears, that ever and anon flashes of vivid light, as the blue lightning of heaven, darted through and round the lines; a sea of plumes formed the shadowy background of their gleaming flashes, effectually aided by the heavy canopy of countless banners floating above them, far too numerous, too closely mingled, for many devices to be distinguished. In front of this immense mass, and slightly in the rear of Gloucester's infantry, stood a regally attired group of about four hundred chevaliers, in the centre of which, gallantly mounted and splendidly accoutred in golden armor, his charger barded in unison, bearing himself in very truth right royally and bravely, as the son of his father, the monarch of England sate, his white and crimson plumes falling from his golden helmet in thick masses to his shoulder. On his right hand rode the celebrated crusader, Sir Giles de Argentine, and on his left Sir Ingram Umphraville, an equally celebrated English baron, while to Aymer de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, already mentioned in this eventful history, was intrusted the command of the monarch's body-guard, the four hundred men-at-arms, thus gathering round his own person a host of chivalry, unmatched in valor and in fame, save by the one mighty spirit

who led the opposing troops. Directly behind the king, and in the centre of his knightly guard, waved the heavy folds of St. George's standard; the situation of St. Edmund's and St Edward's will be noticed hereafter.

There was no change in the Scottish line; it occupied exactly the same position as of the preceding evening, save that King Robert, now mounted on a war-horse, magnificent in proportion, though almost gigantic in size and superbly barded, to suit the rank of his rider, had changed his position from the front of his lines to the spot commanding the second line, close beside the Lord of the Isles and the men of Carrick; concealed by these, but so near as to be ready for instant obedience to the signal of the king, stood a body of horse, and on these, though he spoke it not, Robert depended much for the ultimate glory of the day.

The English army paused on their whelming way, halted to a man; the trumpets sounded their brazen clamor—the echoes of hundreds and thousands of hoofs ceased to reverberate on the ground. Silence had fallen on that mighty multitude, a sudden thrilling stillness, like the awful hush of nature ere the bursting of a storm. It was at that moment a form was visible on that craggy summit rising midst the woods of St. Ninian's, visible to all; for from that point the whole battle-plain, with its opposing armies, lay clear as a map, displaying every nook of ground, every movement of each army, without one hidden point—there stood that form, its dark drapery distinctly traced against the summer sky, visible to all, but noticed only by a few. Was it the near advance of the foe, the nearing of that eventful moment, the strife for victory or death, which caused two hearts within King Robert's army to throb almost to pain—the Lord of Douglas, Sir Amiot of the Branch? Both had looked on death, had hoped for victory too often and too long for this. But not yet could the form of the Lady Isoline Campbell meet their glance, yet find those hearts unmoved—one doubting glance; for could it be—could it indeed be Isoline? It was but the doubt of the moment, for they knew hers was not a character to remain in passive endurance at the altar's foot. She could face danger, she could gaze on death, and she would witness the fate of her country, watch the progress of her own, whatever it might cost her, rather than *wait* as others, calmly, passively, the result. Both warriors knew this; and

if Douglas had needed further incentive to the superhuman efforts he had inwardly sworn to use, that glance had given it; prouder he sate his charger, more loftily erect, and there was a glowing spirit of heroism in his soul, that might not speak defeat.

And how felt Sir Amiot? Still, graceful as a sculptured statue, he sate his horse, whose sable hide, unspotted by a single hair of white, seemed well adapted to the dark, sombre armor of his master; the vizor of the helmet was of course closed, its heavy raven plumes lay resting on his shoulder, scarcely moving, so perfectly motionless was the attitude of the knight, by the breeze that so softly and revivingly swept by. His answers to his sovereign's animated converse had been so soldierlike and to the point, as usual, that Robert dreamed not the thoughts at work within that manly breast, guessed not how wholly, how painfully they were engrossed. The knight gazed upon that beautiful form, looked as an enthusiast votary on the idol of his adoration, and he felt that midst that multitude her heart's gaze was upon him; yet how dared he rejoice it was so? A sickness as of death crept over him; she was there to witness *his* efforts to obtain her, to bless him with the encouragement of her angel presence—and what would she behold? Oh, who may speak the agony of that one moment, crushing his very soul! he felt as if his whole frame were bowed before it to the earth, on which he almost wished to lay when that fight was over, midst the glorious dead. She might weep him then. Despair was on his heart —black, cold, nerveless despair. Yet hope struggled up from the turbid chaos; he would triumph, still triumph! and the banner of St. Edward waved in air, divided from St. Edmund's by the whole extent of the intervening line, the one at the extreme right, the other at the extreme left, presenting insuperable obstacles to his ambition, rendering the very dream of gaining both the mad coinage of an unsettled brain.

The Lady Isoline gazed on the scene beneath her, for the first moment so wholly wrapped in a species of thrilling awe and exciting admiration as to lose entirely the recollection how much her own happiness depended on the event. She heard not the half-timorous, half-suppressed exclamations of wonder, admiration, and terror, breaking in a strange medley from her companion, an attendant who had conquered her own fears of a

battle rather than her beloved lady should look on such a sight alone. For one minute Isoline Campbell was an enthusiast, a patriot—seeing nothing, feeling nothing but the glory of her country, the danger to which it was exposed—the belief, conviction, certainty, she would triumph over all; the next she was but a woman, a loving woman, seeing but one amidst that wondrous mass, trembling lest she had exposed him unto death. Why did he not look up, give one sign he saw, he felt her presence? One moment she thought thus, the next reproached herself for wishing one thought apart from Scotland at a moment such as this.

Suddenly, and so simultaneously it seemed but the movement of one man, the followers of her uncle, the assembled troops of every class and every line, sunk one knee to earth; plumes mingled with the manes of the chargers, as every helmeted head bent down in lowliest adoration. A half shout of exultation seemed waking from the English ranks, as if they deemed it was in acknowledgment of their superiority this lowly homage was paid; but speedily the shout sunk into murmurs, then died away, as the cause of this unexpected movement became visible. Bareheaded, barefooted, his silver crosier in his aged hand, Maurice, Abbot of Inchaffray, in full canonicals, followed by five monks, slowly and majestically passed before the Scottish lines, in loud, unfaltering tones pronouncing his blessing on their brief though fervidly-breathed orisons, and on their patriotic purpose. There was no tremor in his step, no faltering in his voice, and, struck with admiring awe, the English hushed the signal for the onset on their very lips.

Isoline watched the progress of the venerable man with an intensity of interest that checked the words of prayer, though they had language in her heart. He passed from her sight; the warriors sprung from their kneeling posture; the knights sat anew, erect and firm, on their pawing chargers. A hundred trumpets sounded from the English line, followed by a rush like thunder, and a discharge of arrows so thick, so close, the very air was darkened; they dispersed, and again the whole field was visible to Isoline. Onward, in full career against Edward Bruce's left wing, the Earls of Hereford and Gloucester rushed; but one glance sufficed to prove somewhat had chanced to discompose their steady union, and that they had rushed forward to the charge with infinitely more of rival

ship than order. Again and yet again they strove to penetrate the solid ranks of the Scottish spearmen; horses rolled on the earth, flung headlong back by the massive spears, leaving their masters, often unwounded, to the mercy of their foes. Fiercely and valiantly the earls struggled to retrieve their first error, and restore order to their men-at-arms. Indignant, almost enraged, Gloucester fought like a young lion, and little did his enemies imagine the youthful knight, whose mighty efforts excited even their admiration, was the very noble for whose safety their monarch was so anxious, that almost his last command had been to spare the Earl of Gloucester.

Meanwhile, taking advantage of this confusion, Douglas and Randolph, at the head of their respective divisions, attacked with skill and admirably tempered courage the mass of infantry, who stood bewildered at the unexpected discomfiture of the body they had looked to for support; the charge, however, roused them to their wonted courage, and they resisted nobly. Again the archers raised their deadly weapons to the ear, and again the air became thick with the flight of arrows, longer, heavier, more continued than before. Their effect was too soon perceived in the ranks of the spearmen; many places left void, which had received unmoved the charge of the men-at-arms. Quick as the lightning flash, King Robert darted along the line. "Now, then, Sir Robert Keith, on for Scotland—the Bruce and liberty!" he shouted; and quick as the words were spoken, the Marshal of Scotland, at the head of four hundred men-at-arms, wheeled round full gallop, and charged the English bowmen in the flank and rear with such vigor and precision, as speedily to turn them from their fatal attack upon the Scots to their own defence—a defence which, as they had no weapons save their bows and short hangers, was of little service, ill-conducted, and of no effect against the cavalry; they fell in numbers, and thicker and thicker waxed the confusion and the strife. It was now the Scottish archers' turn to gall their adversaries: the flight of arrows fell swift and true; and still, despite the vigorous proceedings of the Scottish troops, the greater part of Edward's mighty army remained wavering and uncertain in their position. Now and then a body of gallantly accoutred horse rushed forward, joining indiscriminately in the *mêlée*, but neither order nor steadiness marked their movements. Edward himself indeed proved worthy of his high

descent; his white and crimson plumes waved alternately in every part of the field, marking that no lack of personal bravery was there, though the talents of a general were either much needed, or the confined and unequal ground utterly frustrated effectual movements of the horse, and rendered the greater strength of Edward's army literally useless.

The Bruce had returned to his post; his eagle glance moved not for an instant from the field. Order had disappeared from the English ranks, their massive bands broken through and through, tottering, falling like gigantic columns shaken by mighty winds; while firm, cool, inflexible, the bodies of the Scotch rushed amongst them, dealing destruction at every step, proving superiority, valor, strength, in the very face of numbers. Straggling, wavering troops from the main body of the English still joined the scene of action, imagining by force of numbers to turn the day. All was confusion; the clash of arms; the rush of horse; the heavy fall of hundreds, in their onward charge, in the pits prepared; knights rolling on the sward, receiving death often from the hoofs of their own steeds ere the avenging sword-stroke of their foes.

"See, lady, see the gallant Douglas, how gloriously he bears himself!" at length exclaimed the companion of the Lady Isoline, unable longer to remain silent, much marvelling at the lady's taciturnity. "There waves St. Edmund's banner. I marvel he lets it remain so long unsought."

"He seeks it not alone, girl. The Douglas is too noble to attempt its capture till the Bruce gives the signal, and permits the young nobles round him to seek it too. Ha, merciful heaven! see yon English knight who hath borne himself so valiantly; he totters on his horse, his very armor seems concealed in blood. Oh, spare him, Douglas! Who may he be?"

"Noble, lady, by his bearing and his heading that foremost line. Wherefore doth he not wear the surcoat like his companions? we should know him then. Ah! they are parted by the rush of battle, his plume waves on the other side of the field."

"The saints be praised! I would not Douglas's hand should slay him, he bears himself so nobly. Yet, alas! how many are there like him in yon field of blood; why should I lament him more than others? Hark, a trumpet sounds! there is a move-

ment in the king's line. Now then—oh, mother of mercy, give me strength, I will look upon them still!"

So spoke Isoline, her heart throbbing almost to suffocation, as she recognized in the movement of her uncle the signal for that general rush to hand-in-hand engagement which permitted space and time for the ardent aspirants to her hand to seek and win the prize.

The voice of the Bruce met her ear, but its strained sense could not distinguish the words, though her heart conceived them. Galloping from line to line, "Forward, young knights, seekers of love and glory, St. Edmund and St. Edward wait ye!" he exclaimed. "Lord of the Isles, my hope is constant in thee!" and dashing down the slope on which he stood, rushed into the thickest of the fight, followed by all his reserved troops, and for the first moment closely surrounded by the gallant band of youthful chevaliers, whose ardent spirits had been with difficulty so long restrained; fresh, eager, joyous, on, on they charged, seeming, in the confusion of their foes, infinitely more numerous than in reality they were, turning retreat to flight, wavering to retreat; hundreds, nay, thousands turned from that fatal field, leaving uncounted thousands struggling gloriously still."

"They retreat—they fly, bearing the banner with them. Lady, lady—Douglas, Strathallan, Fraser—on, on they rush; they will gain it still. Now they halt; they have gathered round it; numbers flock to join them, double, treble file. Lady, sweet lady, thy cheek hath grown white, thy limbs tremble; let us away."

"No, no, no!" reiterated Isoline, sinking even as she spoke upon the grass; "it is folly—weak, cowardly folly. Mine eyes ache with the glare of sunshine on so many coats of steel 'tis nothing more. Look forth, my girl, do not heed me; tell me, Sir Amiot, the Knight of the Blighted Branch, seest thou not him—goes he not with Douglas? I have lost him in the crush of men and horse around the king; yet he is there, I know he is there—he *must* be there."

"Wears he not a sable plume—rides he not a sable horse, unmatched for blackness in our army? He is yonder, look thyself, sweet lady; alone he rides, well-nigh alone. Why, 'tis madness; St. Edward's banner is still guarded by a host of knights, with pointed lance and barded chargers; he cannot

reach it—he is mad; no, there are other knights on the same course."

"St. Edward's, saidst thou—St. Edward's? 'tis St. Edmund's thou must mean; Sir Amiot seeks St. Edmund's. Girl, thine eyes deceive thee."

"I cry thee mercy, lady, but they do not; see, see, thyself—the Douglas is on one side of the field, Sir Amiot on the other."

"'Tis false—it must be false!" burst indignantly from the lady's lips, and, endowed with sudden return of strength, she sprung up. She looked with desperate calmness on the scene below; all was strife—fierce, hot strife—of horse to horse, and man to man. On the brink of Bannockburn, the extreme right, a massive body of men-at-arms had made a desperate stand around the sacred banner of St. Edmund, falling in their ranks, yet still presenting an unbroken front to the Douglas and the rival knights, who, each seconded by their respective followers, sought with desperate courage to reach the much-desired prize. Refusing all credence to the words of her attendant, so firmly, so truthfully did she *trust*, Isoline first glanced there, but the form of the Lonely Cavalier answered not that glance. Despite the press, the rush, the turmoil, every form was distinct to that penetrating gaze; she could even at that distance recognize the various bearings of the young nobles who had so eagerly sought her hand; not one was wanting, but that one whom most she trusted to behold. Desperately, without the utterance of a single syllable, she turned, and with a shuddering anguish, turning her whole mass of blood it seemed to ice, she beheld, recognized the form of Sir Amiot, urging his horse full speed, far, far in advance of his companions, with about a score of lances and some fifty men on foot, directing his headlong way to the extreme left, where, still surrounded by its guard of men-at-arms and billmen, the banner of St. Edward waved unsullied. She saw, she felt every cherished dream was over; then came upon her soul such a dark chaos of troubled fancies which no effort of her own could dispel; the belief for one brief moment that he had played upon her feelings, had deceived her, the next she flung it from her soul, indignant with herself; he could not deceive. If she lost him forever, she would trust him, aye, trust, till his own lips proclaimed him false. There was mystery—dark, impenetrable mystery; they

had told her of the recompense attendant on the capture of St Edward's banner, but what was that to him? then came the delivery of the prisoners, and then one dark and terrible suspicion, and then again she cast it from her.

"No, no, no!" she inwardly reiterated; "that vow, that fearful vow hath come between him and his love. When he bowed down his knee, avowing his long-hidden love for me, he knew not of this second meed of valor; he dreamed not the fulfilment of his vow should come between us. Amiot, Amiot, there is indeed dark mystery around thee, yet, yet, I will trust thee; lost to me as thou art, I will not believe thee false! Oh, why didst thou not speak? why leave this too proud heart so long doubting that which it so longed for? Lost, lost, and through my own folly!—how may I bear this? God of mercy!" she burst forth aloud, "he will fall through his own rashness; he cannot pierce that wall of steel—oh, save him, save him!"

Her own voice rang shrill and mocking in her ears, for who 'mid the rude clamor reigning below might hear and answer it? The strife was becoming more and more general, more and more deadly, despite the multitude in rapid retreat. Edward of England still kept his ground, flying from post to post, from group to group, urging, impelling, conjuring them still to stand, to recall the ancient glories of his father, and make one last effort for England's honor: and struck by this unexpected spirit in their much-abused sovereign, his warriors, rallying the drooping spirits of their men, still presented a formidable front to their determined foes. The order of battle was utterly broken; but above a score of detached groups still struggled on, falling on both sides without giving in one inch of ground. Already the excellent generalship of the Bruce was evident; the pride, the flower of English chivalry lay helpless in the pits prepared to check the evolutions of the horses, falling before the pitiless swords of the lower soldiery, or surrendering themselves unresisting prisoners to their leaders. Ever and anon came a rush like thunder of flying steeds, proclaiming some new retreat, followed headlong by the victorious Scots, whose thrilling shouts of triumph angered well-nigh to madness their flying foes. The noble form of the Bruce, carrying victory, glory wherever he appeared, welcomed with rejoicing cries by his own men, who, even as they fell, felt that if their dim glance caught him they looked on triumph, and by their enemies as

one bringing defeat, captivity, death. Here, there, everywhere, as possessed for the time with ubiquity, his glorious form was seen; his white plume waving high above his fellows, its spotless purity unsullied by one sanguine stain, one tinge of dust. The bravest barons of England shunned his sword, deeming it scarce shame to turn aside and refuse combat with one invulnerable as himself. Scathless the monarch of Scotland rode that field; the distant arrow bounded harmless from his faultless armor; the weapons, close at hand, turned ere they struck one blow; the lance had no power to turn his gigantic charger from his onward way; and thus he seemed, alike in view of friends and foes, the spirit of that mighty strife, the soul of victory, on which no mortal hand had power.

While this general struggle thus continued, neither Douglas nor Sir Amiot had relaxed their herculean efforts. Around the rival banners the battle in truth waxed hottest; for so great, so intense was the desire to possess them, not a Scotsman fell but his place was instantly filled up with warriors as hot, as eager as had been the dead. On through the closely-pressed lines, followed by about a dozen men-at-arms, spears threatening destruction both to man and horse, swords clashing against swords, with a heat, a velocity, only slackening in death, well-nigh surrounded, wholly cut off from his friends by a thick wall of hostile steel—on, within twenty yards of St. Edward's banner, Sir Amiot still struggled, possessed in seeming of a giant's strength, a power to ward, to attack, to guard, to return blow for blow, all at one and the same moment, till his very foes gazed at him almost in awe, and had it not been for very shame, would have shunned a blade that seemed by magic charmed. On, on, yet closer, but still a double, aye, triple file of men and horse circled the banner; they closed round the desperate knight, in front, in flank, in rear; a dozen war-cries shouted the advance through death. The companions of Sir Amiot, believing the enterprise for them impossible, bore slightly back, and alone, amid that armed multitude, alone. amid scornful shouts of victory, of jeers on his rashness, still woke in ringing tones the war-cry of Sir Amiot.

"On, for freedom—freedom for the prisoners of Scotland! Amiot to the rescue—rescue to the death!" and his sword fell, carrying death with every word.

At that moment new shouts arose of triumph, of despair; the

closing ranks fell back, appalled by the sound, and still more by the apparition that sound preceded. On the brow of the hill rising behind the Scottish lines, an immense body of men, with an incongruous assemblage of flags, banners, poles, and rustic weapons, suddenly springing it seemed from the bowels of the earth, and in the act of rushing down the slope with terrible cries, and clanging drums and uncouth horns, sending such terror to the hearts of England's lordliest warriors, that all thought save of flight departed from them. The very Scotch themselves were startled, though scarcely able to suppress a smile, when recognizing in this new army the servants or gillies, women, and children, followers of the camp, sent there for safety, but who, incited by the patriotic spirit of their victorious countrymen, rushed down to the plain to share the triumph and the spoil. The English waited not to examine the origin of their suddenly-awakened panic, the divisions still compact gave way; they sought to rally the staggering columns, to give them once more force and firmness, but in vain. On every side the trumpets sounded retreat, and fast, fast as their panting steeds might fly, the English fled that fatal scene. The lines around St. Edward's banner faltered with the rest; those on the rear and flank of Sir Amiot fairly turned, offering such slender resistance to the Scottish knights who stood in their path, that ere he knew the cause Sir Amiot suddenly found himself gallantly reinforced; but he was scarcely conscious of it, head, hand, foot, all employed in every movement of his foes; in resisting every weapon raised against him; in urging on his faithful horse, while a score of lances broke against his steel-clad sides. They turn—they fly; the banner seems within his reach, one leap will gain it; forward above a hundred yards in advance of his companions fought the Lonely Cavalier, first in pursuit; they bear the sacred banner in their flight. Sir Amiot rushes onward, nor spur nor rein hath slackened; he nears, so close, so fiercely, they rally once again, they close round their precious charge, but in vain—headlong, inspired, Sir Amiot penetrates the glittering phalanx, his hand is on the banner-staff; one by one its gallant defenders fall beneath his sword; his mother's voice is sounding in his ear, his mother's smile, and look, and form are gleaming before him; shall he fail now?—no, no; appalled, his enemies shrink back from his reeking sword, one struggle to retrieve their loss, and they turn,

they fly. A wild exulting shout burst from Sir Amiot's men, but his lips breathe no word, though his task is done; high, high in the air he waves the sacred banner—his own, unanswerably his own—and round him the young knights throng, nobly striving who first amidst his eager rivals should proclaim him victor.

"Not now, not now!" he shouted, almost breathless, "not yet may I pause; enough, ye own me victor. Fitz-Alan, bear thou this glorious charge till I may claim it; ask me no question, give me but way—I have more, yet more to do."

Sir Walter Fitz-Alan joyfully caught the banner, checking with an effort the question on his lips. There was an irresistible eloquence in the tone of his impassioned voice, in the beaming flash of his large dark eye, carrying his own hope and daring energy to the hearts of his companions; they opened a passage for him. He darted on, foam and blood well-nigh concealing alike the armor and the color of his steed. One glance he gave towards the crag, that form was there, still there; an impulse he could not resist caused him, even at such a moment, to lift his helmet from his brow, to wave it in the air. Did his eyes deceive him, or could it be even then, then—when the heart of any ordinary woman must have doubted, scorned him—he saw an answering sign, a blue scarf as a pennon floated on the breeze! Fancy or reality, the effect was such as to make him dash the helmet to the earth, instead of replacing it on his head, wholly unconscious, in the reviving hope of that one moment, that he had done so, to clasp his hands together in a speechless ecstasy of joy, to snatch the reins, plunge his spurs once more into the sides of his gallant steed, and dash on his headlong way. He saw the banner of St. Edmund yet waved amidst its gallant guard, about a mile from the scene of action, as if the fugitives had there made their determined stand, resolved to perish ere they yielded; still his eye traced the towering form of Douglas, foremost against his foes, dealing, as himself had done but a few minutes previous, destruction with every blow; so rapid were his evolutions both of steed and sword, the eye ached with the effort to define them. On, on darted Sir Amiot, dashing down every opposing sword, every obstacle that crossed his headlong way; on, on, over unnumbered slain, over chargers rolling in the death agony on the grass, over pools whose gory waves gave

fearful evidence of the strife that had been there; on, through the brook of Bannock, turning with shuddering horror even at such a moment from making a bridge of the hundreds and hundreds of slain which encumbered the stream, so as completely to fill up its waters; staggering, failing, almost exhausted, still the noble animal he rode, as if conscious of the precious prize he sought, bore him gallantly up the steep bank, on with renewed swiftness in the direction of the banner; he neared the scene of strife, not a quarter of a mile divided him. Still the banner waved in air, still the Douglas, chafed by this long struggle, almost beyond his usual moderation, struggled fiercely, terribly to penetrate those ranks, leaving every other competitor far in the rear; some of them must have fallen, for Sir Amiot traced but two beside him, and nerved with double hope, with an energy that appeared bright promise of success, wholly insensible of fatigue, of loss of blood, of all save that Isoline might yet be his own, the knight rushed on; his horse staggered, relaxed, made one desperate forward leap, and fell. Another minute and Sir Amiot regained his footing, though with a dizzy brain and quivering frame; still he struggled to spring forward, he stood within a hundred yards of the desired post. A loud shout rent the air, the last man beside the banner lay dead beneath the hoofs of the Douglas's steed, the hand of Douglas had wrenched it from the earth where it was planted, had held it aloft, while shout after shout proclaimed his victory. The earth reeled beneath Sir Amiot's feet; sight, hearing, sense seemed flying. He looked up to that same crag, the form he sought was gone, or his eyes refused to recognize it; there was a dead weight on heart and brain, a cessation of every pulse, a failing of every limb, and the young warrior sunk to all appearance lifeless on the earth.

While these momentous events were taking place in different parts of the plain, Sir Giles de Argentine had succeeded in forcing his sovereign from the fatal field. Fiercely Edward had contended, exposing himself a hundred times to death, imprisonment, danger of every kind, flying from post to post, seeking by every possible effort of high personal valor to turn the tide of battle.

"Away, away!" he cried, as Sir Giles seized the reins of his horse, and urged him forward; "where are De Vesay, Montford, De Clifford, Mareschal? Have I not seen them fall?—

is not their blood around me? Leave me, De Argentine; my people hate me, they will hate me more for this, though God wot, all that man might do to avert this evil I have done. Leave me to lie with those more valued than myself."

"My liege, it shall not be," firmly replied the crusader. "Do not speak thus, it ill befits thee as England's king or Edward's son. A monarch's life is not his own; wert thou other than thou art, De Argentine were the last to compel or counsel flight, but as it is, thou shalt live, my liege, to make thy people love thee."

"They will not, they will not," resumed the unfortunate monarch; "and wherefore wouldst thou lead me? Leave me; seek my sister, bear her in safety. Gloucester, my noble Gloucester, where is he?"

"Away, away!" answered the knight; "they press upon us close. My Lord of Pembroke, bring round your men, see to the king."

De Valence heard the words, and with a skilful manœuvre completely encircled the person of the king, and on they fled, keeping close and firm, till the press of the battle was left far behind.

"Now then, farewell, my liege," exclaimed the crusader, as for one brief minute he threw himself off his steed, knelt at Edward's stirrup, raised his hand to his lips, and then sprung anew into his saddle. "I leave thee in safety; it is *thy* duty to retreat, it is mine to *die*. Never did an Argentine fly. Farewell." He set spurs to his charger, and ere Edward could utter one word in reply he was out of sight.

Again the terrible war-cry, "Argentine, Argentine!" resounded on the battle-plain, followed by the figure of the undaunted warrior, charging full speed the thickest of the Scottish ranks, forward, still forward, though utterly alone. "Yield, yield thee honorable prisoner," burst from hundreds of voices, but he heeded or heard not the appeal; they would have saved him, they sought to elude his desperate purpose, but De Argentine, resolved on death, flung himself into the hottest of the strife, and found it; he fell, covered with glory as with wounds.

Evening at length fell upon the victors, the pursuers, and the flying; the sounds of war, the cries of the dying, the shouts of the victor, had sunk into silence on the battle-plain. Troop after troop of the victorious Scots had returned, bringing with

them prisoners of the first rank and consequence. The slain lay in immense heaps over the field, covering the country for miles; hundreds and hundreds of splendidly caparisoned chargers lay side by side with their noble masters; others were galloping, riderless, over the field, trembling with terror, shrieking fierce with pain. But when the summer moon rode high in the starlit heavens the scene was changed. Surrounded by his nobles, knights, and soldiers, bareheaded, and lowly bending to the blood-stained earth, the King of Scotland knelt, to join in the fervent thanksgiving offered up by the Abbot of Inchaffray to that Almighty God of battles, from whom alone king and noble, knight and serf, acknowledged with heartfelt humility that glorious triumph came. Not a sound broke the solemn stillness, save the fervid accents of the venerable man, the deep responses from the thousands kneeling round. There, in sight of the dead, the dying, the silvery moon gleaming back from the armor they had had no time to doff, the weapons they had wielded so bravely and well, cast from the hands now crossed upon their breasts in prayer, the unhelmeted heads low bent—there was that victorious army, there the bold hearts, conscious of but one almighty thrilling emotion, urging to a burst of thanksgiving equal in intensity to its exciting cause; their souls sprung up rejoicing. The last link of slavery was broken—they were free! Scotland was free!

A brief while they knelt in devotion, and then again all was joyous bustle and military life. Officers and soldiers alike crowded round their sovereign, to every one of whom he had a word alike of greeting and of thanks, eagerly scanning the features of each, as fearing even in that moment of triumph to find some loved and valued one amidst the slain, but even this alloy was spared him; his loss had been so small, that but two knights of any consideration, Sir William Vipont and Sir Walter Ross, were amongst the slain; several nobles indeed were seriously wounded, and amongst them some of the brave competitors for the hand of Isoline, whose energy and desperate valor had led them into danger.

"Douglas—where is Douglas?" asked the king, impatiently, and a dozen voices answered he was still on the pursuit, bearing St. Edmund's banner as his prize.

"He was the victor, then. Now every saint in heaven be praised!" ejaculated Robert. "Douglas, my noble Douglas,

there needed but this to render this day's triumph complete and St. Edward's, whose valiant arm planteth St. Andrew's banner on Stirling's loftiest tower—whose glorious task gives liberty to her captives?"

"Sir Amiot of the Branch!" was the unanimous reply.

"Ha! my noble Amiot; 'tis as we suspected. Where is the gallant knight—why claims he not his own?"

"He will to-morrow, good my liege," the light form of Malcolm the page pushed through the lordly crowd to answer the question. "He is faint from loss of blood—though, praised be the saints, not fatally wounded. He commends himself to your highness, and trusts by to-morrow's dawn to demand his recompense."

"'Tis his ere asked," replied the king. "Say we greet him lovingly and rejoicingly, and grieve he is not by our side. We will visit him ourself ere we seek repose. Ha! Fitz-Alan, methought 'twas from thy hand St. Edward's banner waved, and looked to greet thee victor?"

"Nay, I was but its bearer for Sir Amiot, good my liege," replied the young knight, modestly. "I might not hope to outvie him in the pursuit of this precious charge."

"But thou wert close behind him, Walter," answered the king, laughing. "Thou art a good knight and true, and hast nobly won thy spurs."

The young warrior bowed low, with cheeks glowing with unfeigned pleasure.

"Had not his horse failed him, the Douglas had had a powerful rival even for St. Edmund's in this same Sir Amiot," observed another of the group. "By my knightly faith, I never saw such mighty strength and prowess."

"St. Edmund's!—sought he St. Edmund's? ha!" exclaimed King Robert; but what further he might have said was interrupted by the hasty entrance of his brother, followed by about ten men-at-arms, in the centre of whom stood an English prisoner.

"In this prisoner," said Edward Bruce, fiercely, "I bring your highness an attainted traitor, one deserving death—Alan of Buchan."

An exclamation of surprise, triumph, and execration, all strangely blended, ran through the crowd, save from the king himself.

"That Alan of Buchan!" he said; "thou art mistaken, good brother. We could swear that were not the Alan we have known, by this first glance, even before we see his face. Why, when Alan disappeared, he would make two such men as he. Unhelm him; ye surely cannot all have forgotten the noble son of Isabella."

He was instantly obeyed, and on the removal of the helmet, a movement to which the prisoner made not the least resistance, a face was discovered so wholly unlike the bold, frank, noble countenance of the young heir of Buchan, which even nearly eight years had failed entirely to erase from the recollection of his countrymen, that Edward Bruce himself started back astonished. There was the raven hair, the dark eye, in very truth, features which had been so often brought forward by rumor in confirmation of his identity, but the expression of which they formed a part was as unlike that of Alan as night from day. His was all expression, this was an utter blank; not devoid, perhaps, of regularity of feature, but wholly of that sparkling intellect, the enthusiastic spirit, which had so characterized Sir Alan, who resembled his mother to an almost extraordinary degree; and if there were any likeness in the face of the prisoner, it was to the Earl of Buchan, save that that which in the earl was harsh and dark, in him was softened into a blank; his figure, too, though apparently well proportioned, was peculiarly slight and effeminate, whereas Alan's had been vigorous, and tall as a sapling pine. The young man made no attempt at concealment, nor did he seem to shun the stern looks he encountered.

"Who and what art thou?" at length demanded the king somewhat sternly; "by what right bearest thou a name and cognizance we know are not thine own? Speak, and truly, as thou hopest for life, or, by our crown, thou shalt rue thy falsehood."

"My name is Alan, and a father's justice made me Alan of Buchan," replied the young man, more firmly and boldly than was expected. "It was enough for me to do as he bade me, without inquiring wherefore. The king and peers of England received me as my father's son, a mother's dying lips had given me that father's name; he claimed and treated me in all things as his son: my duty then was to obey him."

"So far thou hast spoken well," replied the Bruce, less

sternly; "but was it thy duty, by falsehood, to cast foul shame upon a noble name, and poison Scottish ears by the black tale that Alan of Buchan repented of his former oaths of fealty to ourself, and would atone for them by fidelity to Edward, and by ceaseless vengeance on the Bruce?"

"My lips were guiltless of such falsehood, gracious sovereign," and a deep blush stained the young man's cheek. "True, I asserted what my father bade me; but such as this I never breathed. Perchance 'twas equal guilt by silence to affirm that which he so frequently proclaimed; but the favor of my sovereign, the intoxicating pleasures of a court, drowned the voice of conscience."

"And of him whom thou hast personated," said the king, with earnestness, "knowest thou aught of him? an thou tellest us Sir Alan lives, that we may find or rescue him, instant freedom shall be thy reward."

"Alas! I fear, my liege, it was his death which opened his father's heart to me. I have thought, by the dark, horrible accents of remorse breathed in slumber by the Earl of Buchan, that death came not naturally, and I have shuddered when I knew that I was occupying the place of one fearfully and secretly removed. I believed my father dead, when, three months since, a packet was brought to me by one who had received it direct from the earl in Norway, sealed by his own signet and signed by his own hand. It bade me seek the King of Scotland, and place in his hands a paper inclosed. Preparations were then making for the relief of Stirling; I could not quit King Edward's side without dishonor, and therefore determined on surrendering myself prisoner, if I could not otherwise obtain the audience I desired: and now that my task is done," he knelt and presented a sealed packet, which he had drawn from his vest, "your grace may do with me what you list."

"Ha! is it so?" exclaimed the Bruce, hastily breaking the large seal and thick silk with which the packet was secured, disregarding every entreaty of his followers to beware lest the scrawl were poisoned. "There is truth in every word the youth speaks. Buchan, treacherous as he is, would not make him so base a tool. No! his better nature is fairly roused. Ha! what is this?" he glanced his eye rapidly down the page, then read aloud—"To Robert the Bruce, erewhiles Earl of Carrick and Baron of Annandale, now king of the whole Scot-

tish realm, these:—Whereas I have hitherto declared and proclaimed Alan of Buchan, son of the Countess Isabella, a rebel and a traitor to Scotland, and true and faithful liegeman to King Edward; one under a solemn pledge to carry on his father's vow of extermination against the Bruce. I hereby do utterly and solemnly deny the same, declaring, by the sacred name of God and the whole army of saints and martyrs, that I have done him foul wrong, and that he who bears the name of Alan of Buchan is not the child of Isabella of Fife, but one born in unlawful wedlock, and but brought from obscurity to assist a foul and wicked scheme of vengeance against both Isabella and her child. I here, from a bed in all human seeming of death, do acknowledge sincere repentance of the same, and publicly avow I have foully injured both my wife and son; holding the one pure and spotless, alike in thought and deed, and for the other, Robert the Bruce, if ever he seek thee, let not the aspersions cast upon his name come between him and thy favor; he is as true to thee and Scotland as his father has been rebellious against both.—Signed, John Comyn of Buchan, at the Monastery of St. Bernard, in the Vale of Christiania, Norway;" and further attested by the abbot and other superiors of the convent, whose names were written in full.

"What think you of this, my lords?" exclaimed the Bruce joyously, as exultingly he threw the packet in the midst of them. "Alan, my noble Alan, the day that gives thee and thy mother back to Robert's court will be a joy to Scotland, and shall give thee liberty," he continued, addressing the prisoner.

"But Sir Alan—where is Sir Alan?" repeated many eager voices; "the scrawl speaks of him as in life, but says not where. An he be still in prison, methinks Buchan's recantation is somewhat unsatisfactory; the wily traitor knows he is safe in making this avowal: his son cannot seek your grace's favor."

"Think you so, my good lords?" and there was a peculiarly arch expression in the Bruce's smile. "Well, well; time may unravel this even as so many other marvellous events. Who would have dreamed ten years ago, the hunted, persecuted exile, without a bed whereon to rest his weary limbs, a roof to guard him from the pitiless storm, should ride triumphant o'er a field like this, compel e'en England's king to fly, her bravest

nobles lying at his feet? think of these things, and marvel at naught which may befall. Ha! a horn—my Douglas. Quick, quick! bring him hither; let the prisoner be removed to all honorable keeping."

The entrance of the Douglas prevented further notice of Buchan's important missive just at that time. The king received him with unfeigned delight, rejoicing yet more in the brilliant success which gave him a yet nearer title to his affection than even the extraordinary skill and courage he had displayed. The young nobleman gave an animated account of his pursuit of the king, who several times had escaped capture almost by a miracle; he had followed him as far as Dunbar, whose governor, the Earl of March, had given him refuge.

"'Tis well; we have gained glory enough, my Douglas," was the king's reply. "We fought alone for peace and freedom; and these obtained, we shall not rest the harder for Edward's liberty. But the young Earl of Gloucester, hast thou seen him? his fate we cannot learn; heaven grant it be life and freedom!"

Various suggestions answered this observation, but already we have lingered too long in the royal pavilion, and must hasten to other actors in our drama, whose fate depends upon its close.

CHAPTER X.

The day following the battle dawned on a busy and varied scene; the soldiers were busy in clearing the field of the dead, in the melancholy task of military burial, rendered perhaps less painful in its details by the grateful perception how few had fallen on their side, compared to their foes. The search for the young Earl of Gloucester was at length successful, and with bitter sorrow King Robert desired the body to be conveyed in all honor to the convent of St. Ninian, there to lie in state till his funeral could be conducted with the ceremonies due to his rank and that vivid remembrance of his noble father which the Bruce still so fondly entertained; messengers were also dispatched to the convent of St. Mary, headed by the

Earl of Lennox, to whose tender sympathy the king intrusted the painful task of informing the Princess Joan of the fate of her son, and implore her to return with him to superintend the last melancholy duties to the noble dead. The convent of St. Ninian offered her a safe and honorable retreat till this was done, and then she was at perfect liberty to return to England, or remain in Scotland, as the Bruce's most loved and honored friend. This duty of chivalry accomplished, the king was at liberty to receive the surrender of the castle of Stirling from the hands of Sir Philip de Mowbray, who, unarmed and bareheaded, bearing the keys in his hand, and followed by his principal knights and officers, was marshalled into the king's pavilion, and in the presence of all Scotland's nobles and their knightly prisoners, on his knee, laid the keys at the Bruce's feet, surrendered himself and all the English within the castle lawful prisoners, and acknowledged him at once conqueror and Scotland's legal sovereign.

"Sir Amiot of the Branch, we commit these precious keys to thy charge, and hail thee seneschal of Stirling, and liberator of its prisoners, an honor fairly and nobly won, alike by thy foresight and valor made thine own," was the king's frank address, as he placed the keys with his own royal hand into that of his young follower, who, clothed with more than usual richness, though he still wore his mask, was standing by his side, seemingly so calm and full of thought as usual, that Edward Bruce had tormented him with raillery on his insensibility, declaring he did not deserve to receive his prize. "Earnestly, we trust," the king continued, "that this reward may give thee yet something more than honor, and thou mayest find amid those prisoners thy prudent words made ours, *that* one on whom so much depends. A brief hour hence we take possession, and trust to find an *unmasked* seneschal will give us welcome." Sir Amiot bent his lips to his sovereign's outstretched hand, and fixed his large dark eyes upon him in eloquent reply. "Young knights who so gallantly struggled for this reward, and whose failure gives ye no shadow of shame, attend Sir Amiot; we wait but to see the banner of Scotland float from the tower, and will instantly march onward."

A joyful shout burst from the youthful knights as on they went, the broad standard of Scotland in the midst of them, and pennons and penconelles glittering from the spearheads in va-

ried array, the torn and sullied banner of St. Edward waved exultingly by Fitz-Alan. On they went, the silver clarion and deeper trumpet pouring forth glad sounds of triumph. The drawbridge was thrown down, portcullis up and oaken doors flung back, and Stirling was in very truth their own. Scottish priscners of every rank and every grade were assembled in the courts, and pressed round them, many of them with sobs and tears calling them their liberators, their friends, and beseeching blessings on the Bruce's head. The warriors flung themselves from their horses, recognizing many as long-lost companions in arms, friends they had deemed were slain. Sir Amiot alone stood aloof, unknowing and unknown; he could not bear to abridge that scene, and ere a free passage was obtained to permit his ascent to the banner turret, the time for the king's arrival was rapidly approaching. A ringing shout from every man below, caught up and repeated by every soldier on the plain of Bannock, and echoed and re-echoed again and yet again, proclaimed the raising of the standard, the standard of Scotland's freedom, the sovereignty of Bruce. Gallantly stood forth Sir Amiot's stately form, as uprooting the flag of England, he held it aloft one moment in the sight of all, then flung it from the tower to the court below, while the flourish of a hundred trumpets swelled forth his triumph. A troop of magnificently-attired knights, on splendid chargers, were instantly visible, leaving the field in front of the castle, and Sir Amiot hastened from the turret in search of the prisoners of rank, none of whom had as yet been visible. He knew not of the name or rank of any save of one, and now that the vow of years was fulfilled, the goal obtained, his heart shrunk forebodingly within itself, as if it were impossible, wholly impossible he should indeed gaze upon that face and list that voice again. How might he prepare her for that meeting—would she know him—believe his identity? oh, the agonizing doubts and fears of that moment, which one effort of volition might dispel, and yet for which he had no power. Had the loss of blood of the preceding day so utterly prostrated him, to make him tremble thus? where was his manhood? He struggled with himself; he paced the gallery to conquer emotion ere he entered that hall of audience where the prisoners waited their liberators; at that moment Walter Fitz-Alan bounded towards him, full of excitement.

"Amiot, Amiot, there is the loveliest vision in this castle I ever set eyes upon, thou hast never seen the like. Se came upon me like a spirit, so full of grace and life, and with a face —the sun has never looked on such another! Who is she—what is she?—an she be *thy* unknown love, Amiot, I will go hang myself in despair."

"No need of that, my fiery Walter; why thou art all but deranged already. What is there so marvellous in a beautiful face? I seek not her; but tell me, tell me, Walter, an thou lovest me, the—the Countess of Buchan—hast seen her? Is she here—is she well?" he laid his trembling hand on the young man's arm, and spoke in such a tone of emotion, Fitz-Alan was for the moment completely sobered, even to the exclusion of surprise.

"The Countess of Buchan—is she the object of thy vow? who could have believed it? I have seen her; she is well, noble, glorious as eight years ago, save—nay, but Amiot, good friend, bear up, see her thyself, and set all doubts at rest. Thou surely art more badly wounded than we dreamed of."

"No, no, I am weakened in mind not body, Walter; it was not thus I thought to meet her. Come, we will go together."

He put his arm within Fitz-Alan's, and, struggling for calmness, entered the audience hall. There were three or four female figures at the further end, and one of them instantly came forward.

"Another of our gallant deliverers! he is indeed most welcome," was her greeting, in tones that brought Sir Amiot instantly on his knee, and he doffed his cap and bowed his head, without once looking on her face, for he felt if he had he must have given way. "Methinks, young sir, in the convent of Our Lady of Mount Carmel we met before; thy valor rescued us from outrage."

"And truly, lady, by him is gained thy present freedom," interposed Walter Fitz-Alan, eagerly; "for his foresight made the ransomless liberation of the prisoners one of the conditions of Sir Philip de Mowbray's journey to London in behalf of Stirling. King Robert hails him seneschal of Stirling, deliverer of its prisoners; I pray thee look upon him thus."

"And who is this valiant knight—hath he no name? I pray thee, gallant sir, say unto whom Isabella of Buchan is indebted

for this blessed day; who gives her back to Scotland and to freedom?"

"One who five years hath sought it," lady, replied the young knight, raising his head, and gazing on her expressive face, while his voice strangefully and painfully quivered; "one, whose duty it had been to do so, had there been no deep love, no glory in the deed. Lady is there none, thinkest thou, to whom thy liberty, thy joy, could be the first grand object of a life—none to whom for thy freedom e'en death were welcome? Oh, speak."

"There was but one," replied the countess, fearfully agitated; "but one whose love for Isabella could lead him on to this—but one, and he—oh, wherefore shouldst thou speak this? I have no son."

"Might it not be that the tale they told was false; that Alan lives, though nameless—hidden even from his friends, till his mother's worth might be reflected upon him, and vouch his truth. Oh, do not sink now; mother, my noble mother, live, live, to look upon, to bless thy child!"

Paler and paler, till her very lips became white as marble, the countenance of the countess had become, while her hand convulsively grasped his shoulder, and her whole frame shook as an aspen; the knight had dashed his mask and plumed cap aside, had flung his arms convulsively around her knees, and with one long look of irrepressible love upon her face, had buried his head in the folds of her robe, and that long pent-up emotion broke forth in choking sobs.

"Alan, Alan! have I a son—did he say Alan lives? God of mercy, let this be no dream! Look up, look up once again—'twas thus I saw him last: oh, what have been these long years of misery? My child, my child, speak, tell me I am not mad! No, no, that face, that glorious face—thou art mine own! Oh, God of mercy, thou hast given me back my child!"

She had lifted his head as she spoke, she had put back the long clustering hair, gazing on those beautiful features, with a look of such fearful wildness, such intense inquiry, Fitz-Alan trembled for her reason. Her voice had become more and more the accent of delirium, until, as with an almost prostrating effort, she conquered it, and seemed compelling herself to calmness; and then, as Alan, in answer to her agonized appeal, "Speak, tell me I am not mad," repeated that single word

"Mother," checking his own emotion to support her, the tightly-drawn brain gave way, and with a burst of passionate tears she sunk upon his bosom, folding her arms around him, murmuring his name, conscious only she gazed upon her son.

Time passed, how much neither of those long-separated ones might know. There had been a trumpet sounded without, a burst of shouting triumph, of loyal acclaim, a tramp of many feet, alike in the courtyards and the castle hall. They had been left comparatively alone, for Fitz-Alan had obeyed that trumpet sound, and the other inmates of the chamber had kept far aloof, feeling the emotions of that mother and son were far too sacred to be looked upon; but *they* knew knothing of all these things; they felt nothing but that they were clasped to each other's hearts, that tears were mingling; that there was such deep joy dawning for Isabella, her brain might scarce bear the change; quivering and trembling beneath it, as the eye, long accustomed to the darkness, shrinks back almost in pain from the dazzling flash of light by which it is dispelled. Alan felt not this; he only knew he could lay his aching head upon her breast, and feel that there was on earth one who loved him, one that he might love, whose tenderness might quench the burning agony that raged within. A well-known voice aroused them, a kindly arm unclasped the trembling yet convulsive hold of Alan from his mother's drooping form, and gently bade her wake to joy and freedom.

"No, no, we will not homage, lady; though hast enough to feel, to see. The Bruce needs not the knee of Isabella to proclaim him sovereign," exclaimed Robert, kindly; and startled into consciousness by his voice, both the countess and her son found themselves surrounded by the sovereign and his knights; the former would have knelt, but was effectually prevented.

"We would rather beseech thee to forget all concerning us, savé that we are a faithful friend, to whom the thought of the misery thy loyalty to us hath called down on thee, hath ever been a thought of pain, which we would long ere this have banished, had heaven permitted us by the sword's point to gain thy freedom. We dreamed not till this morning this blessing awaited us, that midst the prisoners of Stirling was the Countess of Buchan, or perchance we had scarce waited so patiently for Edward's coming."

"There is dearer blessing in store for thee, my gracious

liege," returned the countess, restored by a strong effort to her usual self-possession, and even at that moment forgetting all personal feeling to pour into the Bruce's heart a portion of her own deep joy. "Look yonder, my sovereign, seest thou not one whose freedom and whose presence are dearer, more precious yet?"

The crowd had unconsciously divided to permit the entrance amongst them of that same lovely girl whose beauty had so bewildered Fitz-Alan, and who now stood amongst those warrior forms, three or four yards from the king, gazing upon him with an expression of such reverence, admiration, love, that every eye turned for the moment from Alan of Buchan to rest on her. The Bruce looked towards her, started, stood doubtful, but, ere the doubt was solved, the fair girl had bounded forward, murmuring, "Father, hast forgotten thy little Marjory?" and the sovereign had folded his daughter to his warrior heart.

With arms folded on his bosom, a countenance deadly pale, a mien yet more loftily erect, Alan of Buchan stood by his mother's side, almost concealed by drooping tapestry, as his fellow-knights and nobles thronged round the countess to pay her the respectful homage her sufferings in the Bruce's cause so well deserved. He could not come forward; even at that moment the remembrance of the detestation in which his whole line was so naturally regarded by the faithful followers of the Bruce was on his heart, bowing it to the dust; he had fought, had bled for his king, had saved his life, but what mattered these things? he was a Comyn still, and not till the sovereign's own voice was heard in eager inquiry, "Alan, where is my noble Alan—why does he shun me?" had he courage to bound forward, and prostrate himself at Robert's feet.

"Here at thy feet, my liege. Oh, take not the love thou didst vouchsafe to the nameless Amiot from him who bears a traitor's name. Let me but feel I have still a claim upon my sovereign's love, that the years of faithful service, as an unknown, nameless adventurer, have not been all in vain. The dark mystery around me is solved; for my mother's sake, accept my homage still."

"Nay, ask that of the prejudiced, tyrannical fool of England, not of the noble Robert, who ever loved thee, Alan, e'en when the whole world believed thee traitor," exclaimed the impetuous

Edward, rushing to the kneeling knight ere the king could reply, raising and embracing him. "I have done thee foul wrong, wounded thy too sensitive heart again and again; but who could suppose the solitary Amiot, *sans nom, sans parens,* concealed a being once so lamented, and then so misdoubted, as Alan of Buchan? Who could dream it was a mother's freedom thou didst so nobly, so devotedly seek? though, by my faith, now the mystery's solved, we were all sorry fools, I take it, not to solve it before. Well, well, the past is the past, and all that Edward Bruce may do is to acknowledge and deplore his injury, and crave thy pardon."

"And I, and I, and I," repeated several voices; and one by one the nobles of Scotland pressed eagerly forward to clasp the young knight's hand, to beseech his friendship, to assure him name, ancestry, all were forgotten, all, save that he was the son of Isabella, the noble patriot, the gallant knight, the devoted follower of the Bruce.

Affected beyond all power of speech, there was such a varying of color on Alan's cheek, that both the Bruce and his mother felt alarmed, suspecting the immense exertions of the previous day, or some secret cause, had undermined that health more than was outwardly visible.

"And what may thy sovereign add, my Alan?" he said, when the noisy congratulations of Sir Alan's younger companions permitted him to speak; "what, save that we will find some nobler name for thee than that thou bearest now; a name unstained as thine own honor, thy noble mother's fame. Thy mystery was solved yestere'en to us," he added, with a smile, "though the wits of our good brother and gallant knights were somewhat more obtuse. Thou lookest wondrous puzzled, gentle sir, and perchance will be yet more so. See here, a father's hand hath done thee justice, tardy though it be."

Alan glanced over the paper the king presented. His cheek flushed, his eye glistened; he saw nothing regarding himself, only one sentence printed itself on his heart, and flinging his arms around his mother, he murmured forth, "Mother, my own mother! even by him thy worth acknowledged, thy spotless name proclaimed. Oh, were this blessed moment my last, thine Alan hath not lived in vain."

We may not linger further on this scene, important though it be. Much there was to be explained, much which not alone

the Countess Isabella yearned to hear, but for which the king and his nobles all loudly called; how he had escaped from imprisonment, death, the origin of his vow, why he had kept it so rigidly, and numerous other questions relative to Alan, were asked and answered; and then there was much for Robert to hear from his own sweet girl, from whose beloved form his arm had never moved, even when addressing and listening to Alan, and on whose lovely, innocent face his eye ever turned and turned again, as the eye of the weary and the thirsty traveller of the desert is fascinated to the distant fount, however other objects may pleasantly intervene and seek to turn it thence. He had to learn, and gladly she told him, that Lady Mowbray, under whose charge she and her mother had been some time in England, had so dearly loved her company, that on Sir Philip's sending for her to Stirling, where he was governor, she had prevailed on the king to permit the princess accompanying her, and the queen, after a severe struggle, had consented to part with her child, to deprive her tedious imprisonment of its only comfort, hoping that some fortunate chance might restore her Marjory to the king, her father, sooner than could be if she remained in England.

"My noble, unselfish Margaret, and thy tender wish is fulfilled," responded the king, straining the princess again and again to his bosom; "and thou shalt speedily rejoin us. Not alone a kingdom have I regained, but treasures dearer yet—my wife and child."

While these momentous events were taking place in Stirling Castle, the convent of St. Ninian had been the scene of feelings perhaps equally intense. Escorted by the Earl of Lennox and James of Douglas—whose ardent longings for an interview with his well and honorably-won Isoline had been painfully damped, by the assurance of the abbess that she was really too much indisposed to see him so early in the morning, as he had entreated—the Princess Joan, Countess of Gloucester, had arrived, and been received with all the deference her rank demanded, all the true heartfelt sympathy her loss had claimed. A brief while she had passed alone beside the body of her child; her agonized forebodings all were realized, and that she had foreboded this could not assuage its pang. The first anguish of that mother's heart no eye had witnessed, and when she left that room of death, the touching

dignity of silent, lasting grief alone was visible. She sate with the abbess, sometimes silent, sometimes speaking of the lost, when lightly and suddenly, as usual, Agnes stood before them.

"They have won, they have won!" she said, putting her arms caressingly about the abbess's neck. "Said I not Scotland would be free—Robert should be glorious? Oh, he will need Agnes and her own faithful lover no more, and so he hath gone up, up, where I may not see him; but I know I shall go to him soon, he hath whispered it in his own sweet voice. Ha! who is that?" she interrupted herself, and her eye fixed itself on the face of the Princess Joan with such intensity, the orb seemed almost glazed. She passed her hand over her brow, as if there was a pressure of pain, and every feature gradually contracted, as if under some powerful effort of mind. "Who is that? I should know the face if I had memory. Why does it conjure up such horrible fancies, that strange awful dream, which sometimes is so clear I believe it must be reality? yet how can it be, when he was never on earth? They never could do to him the horrible things I saw. Lady, sweet lady, in mercy tell me who thou art!"

"Alas! poor sufferer, I fear me thou hast all too vivid a remembrance," replied the princess, at once recollecting Agnes, and divining her affliction and its cause. "Do not look upon me thus, my child; ask not a name that must bring with it but memories of sorrow. Look on me only as a friend who loved thee, dearest."

"Loved me! Where didst thou know me? Memories—I have no memory. But tell me, oh, tell me, who thou art. The cloud is gathering darker; Nigel, Nigel, let it not descend Who art thou?"

Terrified at the increasing wildness of look and tone, though trembling at the effect the sound of her name might produce, the princess tenderly replied—

"My name is Joan, sweet girl, the Dame of Gloucester."

"Gloucester, the Dame of Gloucester!—what hath that name to do with me? Why should it bring such agony? What are these forms that throng upon me? they press, they hem me round. Oh, give me way, let me go to him—it is my husband!" and with a wild shriek of horror, the unhappy girl dropped senseless on the ground.

It was long ere they could restore her to life, to consciousness of outward things; and longer still ere she had strength to raise herself from the couch where they had laid her, to raise her hand to her aching brow, to stand erect; but the placid smile of infancy returned, and she was calm, gentle, caressing as her wont, without one trace of the fearful paroxysm that had thus prostrated her, save the fast decay of frame.

The Lady Isoline sate alone within her chamber, her elbow rested on a table near, one hand supporting her head, while the other hung by her side, her whole position presenting in its repose that utter abandonment of expression which we sometimes see in a marble statue, and which, without the aid of either sound or coloring, fills the heart and eye with silent sympathizing tears.

The Lord of Douglas had just left her, so full of his own happiness, his own deep love, that he could not be conscious of alloy. He knew, had long known his love was not returned with the warmth he gave, and therefore that his rapturous expressions of affection, gratitude, devotion met with but gentle, quiet, dignified replies had no power to quench that joy; he looked to a life to gain him the love he longed for, to deeds of such unobtruding worship, which his knowledge of her character inspired, at length to obtain him somewhat more than esteem, and till then his own love, the consciousness she was his own, was all-sufficient for the completion of individual joy. Not a dream, a thought that her heart was preoccupied had ever entered his soul; and, despite all her resolutions, all her wishes, she could not in that interview tell him. She thought to have seen the supposed Sir Amiot ere she and Douglas met, to have that strange mystery all dissolved, his name and rank acknowledged, and in them to find some sufficient cause for this avowal; for still, aye, though hour after hour passed and he came not, made no effort to seek her, still she *trusted*, would not believe him false, though eye and ear and memory and reason's self, all rose up to crush that trust, to tell her loudly she clasped a shadow. How passed that dreaded interview with Douglas, what she had said she scarcely knew, save that she had made no profession of love, had given him no word to lead him to believe she felt for him more than she had ever said, and there was some faint comfort in that thought. But now

that he had left her, the utter prostration of mental strength was again upon her, bowing her heart with a load of suffering as impossible to be defined as to be conquered. What did she seek? what good to see Sir Amiot again, to hear his lips solve the mystery around him? how would that avail her and give her back to joy? She might have asked herself these questions and many more, but answers came there none; and it was something peculiarly touching to see that high-born maiden, whose heart had ever seemed too proud and yet too light, too full of effervescence to retain the shade of sorrow, drooping thus; her very attitude denoting utter, utter hopelessness. How long she remained in this position, how long it was since Douglas had left her, she was wholly unconscious, as also that an attendant had entered, asked some question, and been answered by an assenting sign. A deep sigh aroused her, a sigh so responsive to her own thought at the moment it sounded, that it fairly startled her into hastily raising her eyes, and looking inquiringly around her. About a yard from the door of her apartment, over which the tapestry had again closely fallen, as if either bodily or mental powers had failed to the utter prevention of his further advance, stood a tall, martial figure, whose rich and graceful attire could not conceal that the limbs were painfully enfeebled; his head was uncovered, his fair face, pale as death, but beautiful even in its suffering, fully exposed to view; his raven hair pushed from his marble brow, and falling in long curls on either side, rendering perhaps that ashy paleness more painfully striking. Isoline cast one doubting glance; could she be mistaken in that form, those eyes? though the face was more beautiful than her wildest dreams had pictured. But if it were him, why did he not approach her—why stand thus, distant, reserved, as had been so long his wont? Forgetting her situation, her engagement, her dignity, every thing but that him she loved was before her, Isoline sprung towards him.

"Amiot, Amiot, thou art come at length!" she wildly cried. "Oh, why not before?"

"Not before! Couldst thou think of me, wish for me, now—now, when thou must deem me perjured, false? Lady, sweet lady, oh, do not speak to me thus gently; better harshly, better proudly—for oh, have I not lost thee?" he sunk on

his knee before her, clasping her robe with both hands, and raising to hers his speaking eyes.

"And yet I trust thee—yet I know thou art not, hast not played me false! Amiot, I had not loved thee could my mind thus waver, sentence thee without a hearing; but I forget what I am, forget that thou, thou hast struggled for me, and in vain." Her voice grew more and more faltering, and, mocking every effort at control, she sunk on the nearest seat, and burst into a passion of tears.

Sir Alan sprung to her side, almost as much agitated as herself; he threw his arm around her, but so respectfully, Douglas himself had scarce condemned the action. He spoke to her gently, soothingly, recalled to his own noble self by the suffering of one beloved.

"In very truth this is sad, foolish weakness, Amiot; I know not myself; but it is passed now, and I am Isoline again. Sit thee beside me, and tell me all thou hast come here to tell; first, who art thou?—'Tis strange my woman curiosity hath not asked this before, but truly I have either dreamed of such a face or seen it once before." So she spoke, even while her whole frame trembled with the violence of emotion, while a sensation of sickly faintness was upon her, while the large tears stood on the silken lashes, giving new softened beauty to her features, despite the quivering smile upon her lips.

"Thou *hast* seen it, Isoline. Perchance, if I tell thee to whose weal, whose liberty, my life was vowed, thou wilt scarce give my lips the painful task to speak a name which must be hateful to a daughter of the Bruce. Men said it was to a bride or a betrothed my life was pledged. I heard them at first unheedingly, carelessly, my only desire being to conceal effectually my name, which, were the truth known, would undoubtedly be discovered; but when I saw thee, when other feelings took possession of my soul, I longed to contradict the rumor, to tell the whole world my heart was free as was my hand; but I dared not, lest I should betray more. Isoline, it was a mother's liberty I sought."

"And that mother is Isabella of Buchan, and thou art Alan. Oh, fool, fool that I was, not to divine this from the first!" exclaimed Isoline, in a tone of such bitter self-reproach it almost lost Sir Alan his partially regained control; "thrice-blinded fool, when I pondered again and yet again on thy devotedness to

our poor afflicted Agnes, striving to reconcile it with the tale they breathed of thy betrothment to another; where was my boasted penetration? Oh, had I dreamed of this, how changed had been our fates!"

"Wouldst thou, couldst thou still have loved me, Isoline? A Comyn—son of a rebellious, hated, contemned race; one stained with attempted regicide, with treachery and crime."

"What signified thy race, when him I loved was in himself a host of truth, of honor, loyalty, valor—all that chivalry claims and woman loves," answered Isoline, impetuously. "Alan, Alan, how little knowest thou a woman's heart, to dream a name could arm it 'gainst a life! No, no, 'twas the foul tale they told, that Alan of Buchan was sworn to England, that blunted every faculty and blinded me to facts now so palpable!"

"And thou didst believe that tale?" inquired Alan, mournfully.

"It was not till there were those who told me they had seen thee, Alan, and then I did not hold thee false, but held perforce to act the part they told; and not always I believed this, but rather that the first tale I heard was true, and, to hide his unnatural crime, Buchan had substituted some other in thy stead."

"And thy penetration there told thee truth. It was to conceal a supposed crime my unhappy father promulgated a falsehood he has now utterly repented and atoned. Listen to me, Isoline: my tale is a long one, and now, alas! may avail me nothing: yet thou shalt hear all, though I did not think to tell it thus." He paused, in evident emotion, but conquering it with an effort, continued, "Thou knowest all the particulars of my beloved mother's capture, that she was conveyed to Edinburgh, under the horrible impression that her patriotism, her devotedness to Scotland and the Bruce, had caused the execution of her only son by a father's hand. I too was told this, and the horror of the agony this intelligence would occasion her almost caused me to waver for a brief interval, and betray the wanderings of my king, trusting that, even were this known to his foes, it could avail them little, as the three, nay, the four days which had intervened would have taken him out of reach of all pursuit. But this indecision did not last long; better my mother should believe her Alan dead

than dishonored, the one were a less pang than the other, and I wavered no more. How the deceit of my death, even, I believe, to the discovery of my dead body, was carried on I am ignorant; but a young man of my age and size, one of my father's personal followers, had fallen in a previous strife, and as they stripped me of my clothes, to robe me as a felon, I imagine his body was wrapped in them, and thus heightened the deception; that, however, is of little moment now. I was dragged blindfolded I knew not where, save that we traversed many miles of rugged land and crossed the waves, and when my fetters were loosed and sight restored, I found myself in a rude fort, on a solitary rock, with the broad ocean rolling and tumbling around me on all sides, save the south, where the bleak, bare, rugged shores of Caithness mingle with the clouds. I was but a boy; but, oh, Isoline, not the fuller, more perfected consciousness of manhood could have felt more keenly, more bitterly the horrors of this captivity, worse a thousand times than death. Separated as by death from all I loved, cut off from every dream of hope, of young ambition, burning with desire to strive for my country and my king, to signalize myself as my mother's son, and wash away, through my exertions, the stain upon my race—every hope was gone. I was surrounded by rude, almost savage forms, whose very language I could scarcely understand, and whose visages were hard as the rock they peopled, and whose hearts no more sensible to the agony I endured—the wild, vain yearnings for freedom—than the boundless ocean roaring round. Once they chained me, with mocking gibes, to the flag-staff on the tower for three days and nights, in punishment for an attempt to fling myself into the waves, and kept me fettered and doubly watched from that time forward; and temptation was not wanted to add its suffering, Isoline. Again, and again there came offers of freedom, honor, wealth, if I would but take a solemn oath to forswear all allegiance to the Bruce, to join my father in his oath of vengeance upon him, and in his fealty to England—a promise of perfect liberty of action in all save this, nay, even communication with my mother. Twice did my father himself seek me to make these offers, to threaten severer, more horrible imprisonment, were I still obstinate; and many more times did these fearful temptations come through others, with all the insinuation of eloquent oratory, persuasive gentleness. I scarce

know how I resisted; but I did, God in heaven be praised, I did! Even then, then my mother's image did not desert me; she came upon me in those moments of horror, of trial, more terrible than words may speak; her voice breathed in my ear, strengthening me in my hours of darkness, and I resisted. They could not make me false!"

"Alan, Alan, in mercy cease! were we other than we are, were that brief vision of bliss realized, and I might love thee, oh, I could bear this, glory in thy truth; but now, now, that my soul must root thine image thence, that I must forget—forget—God in heaven, tell me not these things, I cannot, cannot bear them!" and the high-minded girl buried her face in her hands, vainly struggling to subdue an emotion that shook her whole frame with sobs.

"Isoline, dearest, noblest! I have done, I will not linger on these things; perchance 'twere better to have left them in their darkness. But to whom should they be divulged, if not to thee, who, despite of mystery, of appearances so against me—thy very eyes must have condemned me—could still trust, still believe I would clear up all? And deem not this a stolen interview, 'tis with the king's consent I am here, with his permission that I speak."

"How?" interrupted Isoline, hastily.

"Yes, Isoline, but now I left him, pouring into his kindly ear enough for him to wring my hand and wish that Douglas had been other than my rival; that things had chanced other than they are; to bid me seek thee this once, and tell thee all which thy generous heart hath made thy due, and then—then to bid thee, as Isoline Campbell, farewell forever—'twas better for us both."

"Ha! said he so? suspects he aught concerning me—didst say aught of me?" hurriedly inquired Isoline, removing her hands from her face, on which a vivid flush had spread.

"What might I say? boast that, though Douglas had thine hand, I had thy noble heart; that thou hadst so honored me beyond my deserts as to half own thy love—say this, when thou wert lost to me? no, lady, no. He taxed me with my sadness, that now a mother was restored, all of mystery solved, how might I grieve? and I told him wherefore, Isoline—that madly, wildly, I had dared to love—in secret love, though not in secret woo; and had not a closer duty, though, alas! not

dearer love, commanded a mother's freedom before all persona joy, I not alone had loved but I had won thee."

"And he, King Robert?"

"Said much in my favor that it boots not to repeat; seemed on the point of asking a question—for thy name was trembling on his lips—then checked himself, and wished the mystery around me had been solved before, and granted my request to see thee, and myself explain that mystery without a moment's pause. Thou art glad he so far trusted me, sweet one; pardon me, lady, thine eye shineth brighter."

"Do not heed me—do not seek yet to read my thoughts; and oh, Alan, call me Isoline—Isoline still; when the wife of Douglas," she shuddered, "it will be time for that cold word lady. Tell me of thyself," she continued, hurriedly, as fearing she had said too much; "how couldst thou escape from thy dreary prison—how elude their ever-watchful eyes?"

"I had been there now, perchance," he answered, "had not a merciful Providence interposed to save me, through the person of my foster-father, who in his deep love had sworn to discover my true fate, and rescue me if living. To do this he entered the service of the earl, my father, who, from his long absence and utter desertion of his Scottish fiefs, had wholly forgotten his person, a forgetfulness my faithful Cornac was very careful not to disturb. He became so useful to his master, so adapted himself to his caprices, that gradually reserve gave way, and, after a trial of his fidelity for eighteen weary months, he intrusted him with the secret of my existence, his desires that I should embrace the service of Edward, acknowledging that there were strange feelings busy at his heart whenever he thought of me, which made him yearn for my submission, that he might love me; but despite of this, if I would not take the oath he demanded, then I might die, he cared not. Cornac heard him attentively, and promised his best assistance. Old and wary, Cornac effectually concealed from my father his overpowering delight at the intelligence of my existence; but when, after two years of fearful trial, he held me to his bosom, the tears he shed were all-sufficient evidence of his previous suffering and present joy. Still he had a weary task to perform; made seneschal and governor of the islet tower, a stranger to the habits of the rude inhabitants, he knew he must proceed cautiously. As for me, the bare mention of freedom

unshackled by conditions threw me into such a state of excitement, that reduced, exhausted as I was, fever followed and brought me to the very brink of the grave. But this was rather a matter of rejoicing than of sorrow to Cornac, for such was what he wanted. He knew he had sufficient of the leech's art to cure my bodily ailment, but he made no attempt to do so publicly, but reported I was dying of an incurable disease and gave all who chose free access to me, that they might see there was no falsehood. But I need not linger on this; suffice it, that messengers one after another were dispatched to my father, each with more alarming reports of my danger and approaching dissolution. This was a device of my faithful Cornac, to have the sole charge of me to himself, and his plan succeeded, for now my liberty and life were safe in his sole keeping. At nightfall he conveyed me to the mainland, providing for my still weak state of health; he tarried not an hour, but hastened, as he said, to report my death himself; and so well did he succeed, that my father not only believed the tale, but became gradually tortured with remorse that my cruel captivity had caused my death, and that he in consequence was my murderer. With health renewed, I joined the armies of the King of Norway, but that was not struggling for Scotland; my heart was filled with an intense yearning again to fight under my sovereign's banner, and regain my mother's freedom. At length, after a year spent abroad, Cornac consented to my returning to Scotland, on condition that I would solemnly swear not to divulge my name or identity until I could do so in perfect safety, for he naturally feared the vengeance of my father, should the deceit which had been practised upon him be discovered. My only wish then was to devote myself to my loved and injured mother; I had already, in my vigil at arms, before receiving knighthood from my sovereign's hand, taken a solemn oath to devote my whole life to her happiness, to rescue her from danger or imprisonment, and it was therefore without a moment's hesitation I pledged myself to all, nay, more than he desired. I told him I would conceal my features from every eye, divulge my name to none, until my mother's liberty was gained, her name cleared from the faintest breath of calumny. I thought not of the difficulties that would attend the adherence to my vow; the spirit of chivalry was upon me, my heart burned to avenge my mother's

wrongs, to bind itself irrevocably to her, and flinging myself before an altar of the Virgin, I took the vow which this day dissolves.

"On joining the Bruce, another and far more powerful incentive than my personal safety, urged me to strict concealment. I was a Comyn; every week, every month, proved more and more the detestation in which that line was held. Would I, could I acknowledge myself one of a race vowed to the destruction of the Bruce? no; it was enough to feel I was one, that I bore a name synonymous with every thing dishonorable, disloyal, murderous—aye, murderous, for was not the secret and open hand of the Comyn ever armed against the Bruce? I had at first thought to proclaim whose liberty I sought; but speedily the conviction that in proclaiming this I should undoubtedly excite suspicion concerning my own name arrested me, and I felt myself compelled to darken yet further the mystery around me. On my first arrival in Scotland, the sensation of liberty, of treading my own land, of having the free, unshackled power to raise my sword for Scotland and my mother, occasioned emotions of exhilarating buoyancy, of bliss unlike any thing I had ever experienced before. Thou lookest inquiringly; oh, long before I looked on thee, that strange buoyancy had fled. I was *alone;* merciful heaven, what did not that word comprise? The dishonor of my race pressed upon me, crushing me to the dust, and then came the foul rumor that Alan of Buchan was not dead, but false. I, *I,* who had endured such horrible agony to preserve my loyalty to my king—my very brain reeled—and men believed the foul tale; I had no power to undeceive them, for my vow was registered in heaven, my mother's freedom mocked my efforts, and darker and darker grew my onward path. Fears, perchance groundless, unfounded, grew upon me. I had obtained that which I had so yearned for, the confidence, the regard of my sovereign, the friendship of Scotland's patriots, but they knew not I was a Comyn; if they had, would they not have spurned me, hated me? I could not speak these fears, and so they obtained shape and coloring, and hemmed me in with wretchedness; and then I beheld thee, and thy voice was ever kind, thy look full of that voiceless sympathy my spirit longed for. Isoline, too soon I saw the precipice on which I stood; I loved thee, I, a poor adventurer, a Comyn, yet I dared to love a daughter of the Bruce.

I saw thee surrounded by the bravest, noblest, best—what right had I to mingle with them?"

"What right? the right of honor, valor, truth," interposed Isoline, turning her full dark eyes upon him, and speaking with dignity, though sadly. "Alan, acting as thou wert the part of a patriot subject's son, in what could the world cast shame on thee? thine own heart should have been thy safest judge, *that* could but approve."

"Lady, it should; but thy gentle heart dreams not of the bitter agony of bearing a name condemned to detestation, branded with hate and scorn. I loved thee, Isoline, yet I asked myself how dared I love—how dared I permit a personal feeling to come between me and my vow? to think, to dream of happiness when my mother still languished in captivity, whence I had sworn to rescue her? I shunned thy loved presence; I sought to harden my heart, to steel it 'gainst such softening throbs, but I could not, no, no, I could not; if thou hadst power over hearts where hope and joy alone had resting, what was not thy power on one lonely, wretched as myself?" he paused, almost convulsed with emotion, and Isoline could not trust her voice in answer. After a brief silence, he continued, more calmly,—

"I looked upon my afflicted sister, and thy gentleness, thy fondness, which bound her torn heart to thine, made me love thee more. She was the only being with whom I might claim affinity; we were alone of our race. I sought to make her know me, but the effort failed, and yet I loved her more than ever; and every deed of kindness, every look, every word of love from thee to her increased thy power, till my heart contained but thine image, beat but at thy voice. They told me the Douglas was thy sovereign's choice, that he would be thy husband, and how dared I come forward as his rival? If there did come a thrilling whisper that thy look was less proud, thy voice less cold to me than him, I dared not listen to its voice, for how might I seek thy favor without a name, with naught to lay before thee but a heart which would have felt it bliss to die for thee? how breathe aught of homage, when men said I was betrothed to her whose liberty I sought—when I gathered words from thee, betraying thou, too, hadst heard and didst believe the tale, and held all words of homage and of love but meaningless to thee, disloyal to another, nay, that my devotion

to my unhappy sister had sunk me in thine esteem, as strangely at variance with the suspected origin of my vow? Isoline, Isoline, thou didst not know, thou couldst not guess the anguish thy words occasioned the evening previous to my demanding news of my mother, before the gate of Berwick's guarded citadel; and oh, the intolerable agony of that crushed hope! it had sprung up, loaded with such sweet flowers, to be withered ere their fragrance was diffused; and again I struggled to banish the love I bore thee as vain, wholly, utterly vain. But why linger on this? I heard thy lips proclaim that superior valor might win thine hand, I heard thine avowal at the same moment that thou hadst but regard, esteem, not love to give, and my heart sprung up again. I might win thee still, for the day that decided thy fate gave my mother liberty; burst, and forever, the shrouding folds of mystery—thou knowest the rest. I left thee, every sense absorbed in the sweet delicious dream that for me thou mightst feel more than cold regard, that did I win thee, my name, my rank, should not weigh against my claim; and then I heard a second recompense for valor had been published, one which would give me the opportunity of literally fulfilling my vow; for who might dream the nameless adventurer, vowed already to a lady's service, could dream of striving for thy hand? I thought to tell thee all, my position of agonized indecision, but what would that avail me? Thy word had passed to become the bride of him who won thee, and wouldst thou, couldst thou annul this for me? No, I would win both, and won them I should had my noble steed not failed—I would have won thee, Isoline; but what avails it now? Merciful heaven! to know—to feel thou lovest me—I scarce knew how much I loved before, and yet to lose thee thus—why did I live to say it—why live to lose thee? Better to have died!"

"No, Alan, no!" and Isoline turned towards him, and laid her hands, which, despite every effort, visibly trembled, on his arm, detaining him as he started up in agony; "No, no, do not say so; there are other nearer, dearer claimants on thy love. Oh, think on the mother for whom thou hast dared, hast borne so much, and whose love, whose worth demands yet more: think of the poor afflicted Agnes, to whom, though she knows thee not as a brother, yet thou art so dear. Alan, dearest Alan, live for them, for me!"

"What, for thee?" passionately answered the unhappy young man. "How may I think of thee as the loved, the happy wife of Douglas? wilt thou, canst thou wed him?"

"My word has passed, I cannot recall it, unless he give it back," replied Isoline, with dignity, even though her tears were falling fast. "Alan, leave me—nay, nay, I speak not in anger, I need not that reproachful glance; we must part, and wherefore lengthen an interview harrowing to us both? Leave me, Alan, and take with thee my earnest prayers for thy welfare, my fervent sympathy in thy joy of regaining a mother such as thine. Go, in pity do not linger; forget me, save as a true and faithful friend."

"Forget thee!" reiterated Alan. "Isoline, Isoline, can the love of years be banished by a word? But thou art right; why should I linger, when to gaze upon thee thus but swells my heart to bursting? King Robert trusted me, I will not abuse his trust. God bless thee, keep thee, lady!"

He stood before her a moment erect, seemingly calm, but it was only a moment; the next he had flung himself before her, covered the hand he had seized with kisses, and then, with an almost inarticulate "Isoline, dearest Isoline!" rushed from the room.

CHAPTER XI.

The retreating steps of Sir Alan had faded in the distance, but still Isoline remained where he had left her, pale, mute, motionless as a statue; then, as if nerved by sudden resolution, her features relaxed in their painful rigidity, though their deadly paleness remained. She sat down, evidently determined to conquer all appearance of emotion, then rung a silver bell beside her; it was answered by an attendant.

"Has the Lord James of Douglas quitted the convent?" she inquired, and there was not even the faintest quiver in her full rich voice.

"He hath but now returned, lady, resolved on waiting thy pleasure to admit him again; he did but seek his pavilion to bring with him the banner of St. Edmund, which he tarries to lay at thy feet."

"Tell him I will see him now, nay, that I desire his presence," she answered, and the attendant departed.

It was not ten minutes after this message was dispatched, that Douglas, radiant in happiness and animation, obeyed the summons; but to Isoline it had felt an age of suffering, which was so vividly impressed upon her beautiful features, notwithstanding her calm and dignified demeanor, that Douglas sprung towards her in unfeigned alarm.

"Lady, thou art ill. What has chanced? speak to me, for heaven's sake!"

"I have sent to speak to thee, Douglas," she replied, with an effort at a smile, which affected him infinitely more than tears, "and I will, when this foolish heart can gain sufficient courage so to do; but truly, it needs more time than I believed."

"Courage—time—and to speak to me! Ah! how little canst thou read the love I bear thee, and thou canst hesitate to ask me aught."

"Nay, 'tis because I know thou lovest me that I pause," replied Isoline, becoming more and more agitated. "Douglas, thou hast read my face aright, I am wretched; my own proud heart hath made me so, but my happiness rests with thee."

"With me?" repeated the astonished earl, gazing at her troubled countenance almost in terror; "and canst doubt one moment I should hesitate to purchase that happiness, even with the price of my own?"

"Wilt thou, canst thou? generous noble!" burst from the lips of Isoline. "But why should I ask it—why demand it at such a price? Douglas, Douglas, why hast thou loved me?"

"Who could know thee, watch thee, as I have from childhood into youth, from youth to a womanhood beautiful, glorious as thine, and yet not love thee, lady?" replied Douglas, deeply affected; "but let me not speak of myself now—enough, thou art unhappy, and seekest friendship, consolation at my hand. Oh, speak then, dearest, best; 'tis agony to see thee thus, and feel I can relieve, and yet thou'rt silent."

"Silent, hesitating no more," answered Isoline, successfully conquering the feelings that almost crushed her, and dashing back the gathering tears, she turned those large, beautiful eyes upon him, and laid both her hands in his.

"Listen to me, Douglas; I will not wed thee, deceiving to the end. Thou shalt read the heart thou seekest; thou shalt know its every throb, its most secret sigh, and then, an the struggle be too great for thy exalted soul, an thou still demandest that which thou hast so gloriously won, be it so, I will still be thine. Douglas, thou hast sought me, believing my heart free, unoccupied, save by the love of freedom, power, woman's caprice, which my actions have evinced, my words acknowledged. I told thee I had naught but cold regard to give even to him who won me; but I said not that I could love, nay, that I did love, and that it was in the wild hope the object of that love would prove it was returned, by joining the noble band who struggled for me, that my hand, as the reward of glory, was then proclaimed. Do not start, do not look thus: I have more to tell, and how may I have courage to proceed?"

The face of the Douglas had become pale as her own, while the unconscious but convulsive closing of his hands on hers betrayed at once the agony her words had caused; still he made a sign for her to proceed, and she continued.

"Douglas, I was not deceived; though he might not join those who thronged round me that eventful night, in presence of my royal uncle and his court, for he might not then proclaim his name and solve the mystery around him, still aware that the day which obtained my hand gave him also a name, he besought my permission to strive for me with the rest, and it was granted, for it was this I sought. A dearer duty interposed between us; the fulfilment of his vow demanded his first exertions, and thus it was he failed. Douglas, dear, generous friend, thy valor hath won my hand, but the love thou seekest, the love thou deservest, oh, I cannot give thee; it hath mocked my control, it hath passed from my own keeping; my heart hath shrined but one image, and, oh, it hath no room for more. Perchance I have deceived, have done thee wrong, in permitting thee to believe so long my heart was free, and thus might become thine own; but how might I, dared I breathe unto another what I had denied unto myself? Oh, hadst thou but loved me as a brother, as I love, esteem, and reverence thee, Isoline had had no secret from thee, even of her heart! Thou hast a claim upon me now, I acknowledge, nay, adhere to it. I ask nothing but as thine own noble spirit dictates; I have

laid bare my heart, have told thee all. My hand is thine, if still thou claimest its possession, still believest I alone can make thee happy."

There was a long pause. The iron frame of the stalwart warrior shook as would a child's; still he held her hands, still he gazed upon her face, upturned to his in all the beautiful, confiding frankness of her nature; his very lip became white and quivering, and the big drops of intense, though internal suffering stood on his tightly-drawn brow. Isoline could not witness this agony unmoved; he felt her hot tears fast falling on his hand; he heard the low sobs that would have vent, and there was one deep though evidently smothered groan, and then he laid one trembling hand upon her head, and uttered her name.

"Isoline, look up, beloved one!" his voice grew firmer after the first agonized effort; "tell me one thing more—he whom thou lovest—is—"

"Alan of Buchan," replied Isoline, but in a voice so low, it could have been heard by none but one so intent as Douglas.

"And he loves thee, Isoline; loves thee, and will make thy happiness his first, his dearest object. Canst thou trust thy future fate to his keeping without a fear?"

"Aye, as I would to thine," was her instant reply.

"Nay, Isoline, thou must trust it something more. In my keeping, alas! there would be little happiness," he struggled to speak playfully, but he overrated his own powers, and the last words involuntarily breathed such intense suffering that he abruptly paused. "Yes, thou mayest trust him; he is, in truth, noble, faithful, well deserving of woman's love, aye, even of love like thine. I should have seen this, known this, but I was blind, wilfully blind. Isoline, dearest, noblest! for such thou art in thy glorious truth, oh, do not weep. Thou shalt, thou shalt be happy. Give me but time; my energies are stunned—I am not Douglas yet. But thou shalt not have trusted me, confided in me in vain; give me, give me but time. Thou shalt know how dear is thy happiness, how much I love thee; but now, now, God of heaven! now—"

There was no other word, the hands which still clasped hers were cold as stone; he drew her close to him, his lips, burning and quivering, lingered on her brow; he released her, unconscious that the pressure of his hands was tight even to pain; that too at length gave way—another moment and he was gone.

Sir Alan's impulse to rush from the convent, he cared not whither, was arrested by the appearance of the king and the countess, whose anxiety to gaze again upon her Agnes, even though she dreaded finding herself unknown, could not be restrained. The haggard appearance of the young knight could not fail to attract notice, but there was evidently such a struggle for control, that both the king and countess checked the words of anxiety upon their lips.

"Thou must not leave me thus, my Alan. I have regained thee too brief a period to lose thee even for an hour. I want thee ever near me, my child, or I may deem this joy still but a dream of happiness, from which I yet may wake."

So spoke the countess, seeking to soothe the sufferings she intuitively felt sprung from a wound she might not heal, by an appeal to his filial love, and he felt the appeal. Left alone together while the king went to mark the state of Agnes, the reports of whom had alarmed him, Isabella engaged her son so effectually in conversation on all that had befallen him in those long years of agonized separation, on all she had endured, all her feelings, that unconsciously a calm stole over him; and he found himself listening with intense interest to his mother's simple yet trying tale, and by the time they were summoned to the chamber of Agnes, he was sufficiently controlled to accompany his mother. The king met them in an antechamber, the animation of victory, of his thrice glorious success, had given place to an expression of anxious mournfulness which struck Alan at once.

"My sister!" he exclaimed, "oh, what of her?"

"She is changed, Alan, I know not how; I can scarce define it. It seems strange three short days should have produced a difference so striking. I fear me, lady, the hope I have ventured to breathe is vain; that lovely frame is sinking fast, even as the mind grows clearer."

"Thinks your highness she will know me? hath she any recollection of her mother?" falteringly and tearfully inquired the countess.

"I scarce dare answer, for her only thought as yet hath been of me, rejoicing in my glory, in the freedom of her country, murmuring of him, whose task her sweet and gentle fancy pictures now as done. She sleeps; the lady abbess deems it better she should in waking find thee beside her, that thou

shouldst wait her waking; her slumbers are brief as they are light. Canst thou bear to gaze upon her, lady? she is changed e'en since thou looked upon her last."

"Fear me not, my liege; let me but see my child."

The wish was granted; again did that mother gaze upon her suffering child, again kneel beside her couch, where she lay, so frail, so lightly, the cushions seemed insensible to her weight. She lay like a flower, whose loveliness and purity beams forth even from its closed petals and drooping head. A stillness as of death pervaded the chamber, though many lingered within it; the countess and King Robert sate on either side of the couch, Alan, with arms folded, leaned against the wall at the foot, his eyes fixed upon his sleeping sister; the abbess sate at some little distance, but watchful, anxious as the rest. An hour passed ere a slight movement took place in that sleeping form; her eyes unclosed, and fixed themselves in wondering *consciousness* on her mother's face.

"Am I still a child?" she murmured; "have I never quitted my childhood's home? Mother, is it long since we parted? it seems so, and yet it cannot be, or how wouldst thou be by me, watching my slumbers, as thou hast done so oft before? Where am I—is this the Tower of Buchan? and Alan, dear Alan, where is he? I would kiss thee, mother. Why can I not rise?"

Subduing emotion with an almost convulsive effort, the countess tenderly supported her in a sitting posture, and the arms of Agnes were instantly folded round her neck, clinging closer, yet closer to the bosom to which she was so fondly clasped, while the tears and kisses of the countess mingled on her cheek.

"Do not weep, sweet mother; speak to me, it seems so long since I heard thy voice, and yet it cannot be; my sleep cannot have been so long as it appears."

"My child, my blessed child!" was all the countess could reply, despite her every effort for less agitated words.

Agnes hastily lifted her head, a sudden contraction convulsed for a single instant her features, and she put her hand to her brow.

"It cannot have been all a dream. Have I not lived ages of suffering since I heard that dear voice? I thought I was still a child, but childhood cannot have such strange, dark

memories. Yet thou art my mother. Yes, yes, and that is Alan, my own, darling Alan. I cannot be so deceived; but it seems so long since I have seen either of ye—as if a blank had effaced existence. Mother, my own mother, hast thou been with thine Agnes all this time? I do not think so. Fold me, fold me closer—do not leave me again; oh, it is so blessed to look upon thy sweet face."

She was silent a brief while, and neither her mother nor brother could speak in answer. Alan had caught her hand, and was repeatedly kissing it.

"Is there not some one else I miss?" she resumed. "Alan, dearest, is Nigel gone? would he go without farewell?—oh, no. Ha! who is that?" her eye had caught the countenance of the king looking upon her with strong emotion. "That is not Nigel; no, no!" The voice changed suddenly and fearfully, a darker and longer convulsion passed across her beautiful features, she struggled to speak, but for a brief minute only indistinct murmurs came.

"Thou art my mother; oh, 'tis all clear now! there is still a blank, but what caused that blank? It matters not, 'tis all over now; my husband, my dearest husband, thine Agnes will soon join thee; death has no terrors, no sorrow, for it gives me back to thee. Mother, Alan, do not weep for me, life could have no joy alone. And thou, my sovereign, there is a dim sense of unfailing love, unchanging kindness from thee to me, where all else is blank. My husband blessed thee with his dying breath, and so, yet more gratefully, more earnestly, doth his poor Agnes. Nay, tell me not of life, I know that I am dying—memory, sense, consciousness, are all too clear for a dwelling upon earth. Is there not one other I would see, one I have dearly loved—Isoline, my kind, my gentle Isoline, or is she but a creation of my brain? yet her image seems too palpable; an there be indeed such, oh, call her to me."

Words cannot describe the expression of feature that followed the convulsion in which consciousness returned. The Agnes of previous years seemed suddenly restored, save that every feature was etherealized; it was as if every grosser particle had fled, as if an angel had already taken that form, and waited but the archangel's summons to wing her flight above. She had laid her head upon her mother's bosom, a smile of heavenly peace beaming alternately on her and the king, for Alan had

sprung to obey her will. A few brief minutes and Isoline stood with her brother by her side.

"Ah, it was no vision, no vain fancy! Isoline, dearest Isoline!" she exclaimed, with sudden strength, and springing up, she threw her arms around her neck, her lips met hers with one long, last kiss, and she sunk back. "Mother, he calls me; do you not hear him? Nigel, my husband, they have loosed my chains, oh, I may come to thee—joy, joy—I come—I come!"

There was silence; in its fulness, its rich, its thrilling sweetness, that voice was hushed, but so unchanged, unshadowed, was that angelic face, it was long, long ere a breath, a sob, might whisper of death. That mother's glance moved not from her child, as if she still dreamed of sleep, of life—oh, who might undeceive her! neither King Robert nor Alan could break that stillness; but gently Isoline approached, she knelt before the countess, and, raising her hand to her lips, whispered, "The last word was joy. Lady, sweet lady, how may we grieve?"

Isabella's head drooped on her shoulder, with a burst of relieving tears.

"A little while, and I too may joy; the earthly chains are loosed, my blessed child at peace, but now I feel only what my yearning heart hath lost—my beautiful, my own!"

It was near midnight, and Alan and Isoline sate alone beside the bed. The former had succeeded in persuading his mother to retire from that melancholy task, and it was on his return from escorting her to an adjoining chamber, from lingering a while beside her, that he found Isoline bending over the beautiful form of his sister, imprinting a parting kiss upon the chiselled brow. It was evident she was not aware of his intended return, and had delayed the impulse of her heart till he had departed. She started, as on rising from the posture of devotion in which she had sunk she beheld him. He could see the flush of indecision pass across her expressive features; his own breast felt so calm, so tranquillized, that it seemed as if in the holy presence of death even the society of Isoline could not disturb it. He approached respectfully.

"Go not, lady," he said, "an it please thee to rest beside all that remains of one we have both so dearly loved. I have promised my mother that I will not leave this mournful vigil

till morning dawns; but an thou wouldst my absence rather than I should share it with thee, I will report the change of watchers, and doubt not she will rest content. Go not, I beseech thee, an thou camest hither to stay!"

"I do not shun thy presence, my lord, nay, would share thy vigil; this is not a scene, a presence for aught of earth or earthly love to enter on, and for the brief while I linger here it needs not thou shouldst go. I fear no weakness now!" She spoke calmly and collectedly, and nearly an hour rolled by and still found them on either side the dead; but no word or sound disturbed the stillness. No one who casually glanced on those lone watchers might guess their relative positions, the thoughts that perchance were struggling unexpressed in either heart. Large waxen tapers burning, two at the foot and two at the head of the couch, shed their soft light directly upon Agnes, who lay, not like sleep indeed, but beautiful as sculptured marble, every feature so perfect, and in such deep repose, no thought of anguish could linger in those who gazed upon her; all of suffering had passed, it was calm, placid, lovely as a child's, breathing of the peace to which she had departed—and forever. The face of Isoline was concealed by her right hand and the long loose curls that fell around her—in her left lay the cold hand of Agnes; her whole position denoting her mind was with the dead alone. The gaze of Alan lingered alternately on his sister and on Isoline, seeking in that still holy hour the strength he so much needed, but not so much engrossed as not to become conscious that the light of the tapers at the foot was impeded. He hastily looked up; a tall, martial figure stood before them, his head uncovered, his arms folded in a long wrapping-cloak. One glance and Sir Alan had arisen.

"Douglas!" he exclaimed; "my Lord of Douglas, can it be! yet wherefore?"

"Wherefore should it not be, Alan! Who could associate with the suffering, the loving Agnes, yet mourn not she is gone, despite the gain to her? I sought thee, Alan, ignorant of that which had befallen thee, and they told me I should find thee by thy sister's bier."

He paused abruptly. Startled by his voice, Isoline had risen from her drooping posture, had fixed her large eyes inquiringly upon him, for there was something in the very calmness of his tone that terrified her. He had stepped more forward, and

having dropped the cloak from his face the light fell full upon it, and disclosed so fearful a change of countenance that both Alan and Isoline involuntarily started forward, with an exclamation of alarmed surprise. It was as if an age of agony had passed over him, leaving its indented furrows on his features. There were deep lines on his noble brow and round his mouth, which, when he ceased to speak, appeared involuntarily to compress, as if still under the influence of immense bodily pain; his cheeks, usually ruddy, were deadly pale, rendered perchance the more remarkable from its contrast with the naturally swarthy hue of his complexion. His eye, strangely and fearfully bright, yet appeared sunk deeper in its socket, from which the burning agony within seemed emitted in restless flashes; his hair, generally rough with natural curls, now lay on his brow damp and matted; and there was something in his whole appearance so unlike himself, that Alan, wholly unconscious of what had passed, felt his warmest sympathies aroused, and forgetting he was his successful rival, all but that a noble companion in arms was under the influence of some whelming distress, grasped his hand, exclaiming—

"In heaven's name, Douglas, what has chanced—what hath befallen thee?"

"Befallen me? why, nothing," he answered, returning the friendly pressure with a frank though quivering smile. "Nothing but an unexpected strife—a battle, which hath wearied me and left me as you see, looking perchance somewhat exhausted, but not conquered, Alan. No, no, Douglas is conqueror still!"

"My noble friend, what can you mean—a strife, a battle? I have heard naught; nay, thou dost but mock me—the fiercest strife never made thee look thus."

"I never knew the meaning of those words, 'fierce strife,' until to-day, my friend. I tell thee I have fought and have conquered, and am wearied, though triumphant still."

"Conquered—fought—in heaven's name, with whom?"

"*Myself!*" replied Douglas, with such a deep, thrilling emphasis on that single word that it spoke a life. Alan dropped his hand in speechless wonder, keeping his eye fixed on him as on some superior, but the effect on Isoline seemed stranger still.

"Douglas, Douglas!" she exclaimed, with bitter tears. "Oh,

no, no, no, 'tis I have done this; I alone have caused this anguish!"

Douglas put his arm around her, but he pressed no kiss upon that beautiful face, lost in such remorseful sorrow, upraised to his; a slight convulsion might have contracted his features, but it was so momentary that even by Isoline it was unseen.

"Nay, speak not so false a word, sweet one, or I shall chide thee. Thou shalt make Douglas prouder, greater, nobler than he hath been yet, and shall this be a cause of sorrow? For thee, Sir Alan, tell me truly, solemnly, for the holy presence in which we stand is no place for flattering deception—bearest thou no enmity, no envy towards the Douglas for a success, a triumph dearer to him than all the blushing honors men say that he has gained? Are we still comrades, still friends?"

There was a pause, a struggle; for the distress of Isoline, the answering words of Douglas had caused a revulsion of feeling in Alan's bounding heart, and he had stepped back in silence and in gloom.

"Yes," he said, at length, and he placed his hand in that of Douglas; "yes, thy worth is too high, too glorious for Alan Comyn to disdain thy friendship, even though thou bearest from him the dearest hope, the loveliest treasure of his soul. Enmity—oh, not thus degraded am I; envy—try me not too hard, my lord. How may I love, love as thou dost, and yet not envy?"

"And is thy love like mine, Alan? were her happiness distinct from thine, thinkest thou—but enough of this, I will not press thee hardly. Thy words are cold, but I will make them warm; thou shalt love me, Alan; the Douglas will make himself a home in your united hearts, and mourn not he is lonely. Isoline, loveliest, noblest, look up and smile; said I not I would seek thy happiness above my own, and couldst thou doubt me? Alan, here, in the holy presence of the dead, I resign my claim. Oh, love each other; oh, be true, be happy! and I ask no more. Nay, speak not," he continued, with strong yet controlled emotion, "let no shade, no care for Douglas come athwart the pure heaven of your bliss; he loves you both too well to mourn that, for your sakes, a while his life is lone."

Gently, as he spoke, he drew the weeping Isoline to his bosom, and pressed a brother's kiss upon her lips, then placing

her in the arms of the agitated Alan, breathed on them both his blessing.

Oh, virtue, unselfish, immortal virtue, how glorious thou art! how faint, how pale, how shadow-like seemeth the warrior's glory, the sage's wisdom, the lover's glowing dream to thee! Art thou not the voice of Him who breathed into man the breath of life, and giving thee birth and substance in his soul bade thee linger there, despite of woe and sin and care—linger, when oft imagined flown—linger, when seeming crushed beneath the dull and massive woes of earth—linger, as still the golden link 'twixt earth and heaven, the invisible essence uniting man to God, his soul to glory? Oh, beautiful art thou, and glorious the triumph, which, though oft unknown to earth, is caught up by thousands and thousands of ministering spirits to that throne where eternally thou dwellest, eternally thou reignest coeval with thy God!

CHAPTER XII.

The effects of the battle of Bannockburn on the external glory and internal prosperity and happiness of Scotland is a subject too exclusively belonging to history to be lingered on by the chronicler of chivalry and romance. Some brief notice of the fate of the prisoners we must take, and our task is well-nigh accomplished. The spoil collected from the field alone was inestimable, and the large ransoms paid by the numerous prisoners of exalted rank added immensely to the national treasures. A very few weeks sufficed to give King Robert the blessings for which so many years, despite of dawning prosperity and individual glory, he had so intensely yearned. His wife, his sisters, all those beloved relatives and friends, who, from adherence to his cause or love for his person, had for so many years languished in English prisons, were released, their liberty eagerly granted in exchange for that of the Earl of Hereford, Lord High Constable of England. Again was Scotland a free, an independent, nay, more, a triumphant kingdom, strong in her own resources, united in herself, glorying in the sway of an enlightened sovereign, combining in his own

person the wisdom of the sage, the prescience, the prudence of the statesman, and every dazzling quality that could adorn the patriot and the warrior.

Peace was upon the land, her silvery pinions shedding a lucid lustre on the colossal spirit of freedom, now, with gigantic tread, claiming Scotland as her own. The glittering sword was exchanged for the sceptre of the judge. The court was no more 'mid glens and plains, and rocks and forests, nor was the royal palace merely the resort of iron-clad warriors, amid whom the noble matron or the gentle maiden seemed strangely out of place. Rank, beauty, glory, worth, all who had clung to King Robert's service in time of need were welcome there; and joyous in truth was it to the good king to feel reward was in his power, and deal it with unsparing hand on all he loved, on all who so loved him. From the palace to the hut festivity and joyousness danced along the land; from the king to the serf there was naught but one deep feeling of chastened and thankful bliss, permitting, encouraging the dark memories of the past, for in them the present was sanctified and blessed.

Many of the Scottish nobles who, serving under the banner of Edward, had been taken prisoners, were, on payment of some fines and a short imprisonment, received anew into favor, on their earnestly entreating to take the vows of allegiance to their rightful sovereign. Amongst these was the Earl of Fife, who, at his sister and nephew's intercession, found himself restored to his parental estates, without the forfeiture of one title, coupled only with a condition, which, in his present state of mind, he was willing enough to comply with—to recognize Alan as his successor, leaving to him all his restored possessions—married or unmarried, this condition was to hold good to the exclusion of all natural heirs. Now, the Earl of Fife was too indolently and selfishly disposed even to dream of the toils and troubles and little pleasures of matrimony, and, moreover, began, as fast as his volatile and unprincipled character admitted, to take a vast liking to his handsome, gallant, and, what was better still, royally favored nephew. His much-injured sister had met him with the open hand of forgiveness and entire forgetfulness of the unkindness of the past, and he hugged himself in the comfortable belief that, notwithstanding many hindrances to his luxurious habits, Scotland was as good

a country as England to live in, and her king quite as well worth serving as Edward.

True to his promise, notwithstanding the numerous and momentous events with which the day after the battle had teemed, King Robert with his own lips gave unqualified liberty to that Sir Alan Comyn who had been so long imposed on the world as the son of Isabella, and the young man, impressed with the munificence and condescension of his royal captor, voluntarily took an oath never to bear arms against him, and requested permission to retire to foreign lands.

To those in whom the character of Malcolm may have excited any curiosity, it may be well to say from his earliest years the Countess of Buchan had been his benefactress; inheriting from his parents' lips and example the love, reverence, and fidelity they felt and practised, his whole thoughts and affections had centred in the countess and her children, and the secret of his wanderings for the first few years after the countess's imprisonment, was to discover some clue to the fate of Sir Alan; no persuasions, no representations could reconcile him to the belief that he was dead. The barbarous policy of the Earl of Buchan of course eluded all his efforts; but though effectually concealed by increase of stature, deeper voice, and his disguise from even King Robert's eyes, Malcolm discovered Sir Alan on the instant, and vowed his services and preservation of his secret, with an exulting love and fidelity peculiarly sweet and affecting to the desolate heart of his young master; how he performed that vow our readers are the best judges. Now that his task was done, his beloved mistress at liberty, his master freed from all painful mystery, and blessed with happiness beyond all expectation, he no longer refused to throw aside the page's garb, and adopt the more honorable though graver office of esquire, retaining in truth his love of adventure, but failing in nothing which could add to the welfare and interest of his master.

It cannot be supposed that the detail of Buchan's last interview with his son and the justice he had rendered him could fail of sinking deeply on the noble heart of the Countess of Buchan. It had been a struggle, a terrible, almost prostrating struggle, ere she felt she could so school her spirit as to feel she forgave freely, unconditionally forgave her husband the unequalled agony his cruelty, his uncalled-for injuries had in-

flicted. It was not for her own personal sufferings, those she might have borne without once failing in charity and kindness towards him, but the horrible thought he had ruthlessly massacred his child; a thought she knew his dark stern nature too well to doubt, and which she had implicitly believed for the eight years of her weary captivity, for the rumor her boy was alive, and the petted minion of Edward's court, had never obtained a moment's credence in her soul. That horrible image filled her whole heart with such a feeling of loathing, of detestation towards its perpetrator, that she almost shuddered at herself. But Isabella knew where to seek for strength to subdue even this too natural but fearful emotion, for comfort even under this appalling infliction. She had thought with comparative calmness on the supposed death of her Agnes, for she truly felt, in the utter loneliness, the dreadful bereavement of her lot, death were better than life, and gradually, nay, almost imperceptibly, by incessant prayer, after years of anguish, her feelings became calmed towards her husband; she could think of him, at first with decrease of pain, then with steady calmness, and at length with such perfect, angelic forgiveness, that had evil come upon him which she could have averted, she would have hesitated not a moment to fly to his side, offering him the hand of amity, of charity, which no dark remembrance could shade. Such being her feelings while still lingering in lonely confinement, how greatly were they heightened when from her son's eloquent lips she heard of his father's deep remorse, and read its transcript in Buchan's own hand. Again and again she pondered on the past, and in the deep though chastened happiness now upon her spirit, which after a while even the sweet touching memories of the departed Agnes might not alloy, for earth could have brought her no joy, she persuaded herself into the belief that she, too, had judged harshly; that he had scarce deserved the loathing abhorrence with which she had regarded him. In the deep thrilling bliss of clasping her living son to her yearning heart, how might she recall the agony inflicted on her by the tale of his supposed death? The effect of these secret ponderings may be gathered from her own lips.

It was in an apartment of the Castle of Fife the countess and her son were seated, some three or four months after the battle of Bannockburn. Alan, now known only as Sir Alan

Duff, or the Lord Baron of Kircaldie, for the hateful name of Comyn of Buchan might not remain with so faithful and loyal a subject of the Bruce and patriot of Scotland, was carelessly seated on a broad cushion, resting his arm caressingly on his mother's knee, and looking up entreatingly in her face. All trace of sorrow or care had vanished from his eminently handsome features, and completely recovered from the effect of his severe exhaustion and wounds, he presented a model of manly beauty that man might admire and woman love. They were evidently in very earnest converse, interesting enough to make Alan forget that Isoline might be marvelling at his protracted absence, for she and her mother, Lady Campbell, were both, at the Countess Isabella's earnest entreaty, inmates of her parental castle.

"But my dear mother."

"But my dear son."

"Think of the miseries of such a voyage, and the hardships thou mayest have to encounter ere we can obtain even the faintest clue to my father's retreat."

"We, my dear Alan; I do not mean thee to accompany me."

"Worse still, dearest mother; can you think for a moment seriously, thine Alan would let thee take such a voyage alone? but of that matter we will speak hereafter; at present let me for once obtain the conquest over thy noble will. Why shouldst thou seek my father?"

"Rather, my son, why should I not? Alan, I cannot rest in peace till I have personally assured him of my entire oblivion of the past, that though there can be no affection between us, there is that blessed charity which covereth in truth such a multitude of sins. He wronged me, injured, persecuted me; but now, tormented as he is with remorse, who so fitted to shed balm over his dying hour as the object of those wrongs? He has done me justice, and shall I hold back when a trifling exertion may give him comfort? Listen to me, my child; I owe him reparation for what I have ever felt an act of deception, although at the time I imagined a holy duty to the dead commanded it should be persevered in. I gave my hand to thy father, Alan, in pursuance of an early engagement, entered into by our mutual parents, ere we could have a voice. I tacitly acknowledged the holy vows at the altar's foot which

made us one, and solemnly swore to adhere to them to the letter, on all but one point—I could not love my husband; for I was even then too painfully conscious I loved another, a stranger, whose very name I knew not. I should have avowed this, my child, but my courage failed; but though in this I erred, it was only in this, for I have been true to thy father, Alan, a true and faithful wife. The dream of my youth passed away in the deep delight, the blessed cares of maternal love, guiltless alike in word and deed, as in thought; it was not till my solitary imprisonment I learned to feel that had I avowed my real feelings ere I joined my hand with his, much of misery might have been saved me, and much of crime and remorse spared him. I feel I owe him some reparation, my child, and it will be a blessed comfort to my heart to feel that I may bestow it, by proving forgiveness and charity; and if he will permit me, tending his dying hour. Have I silenced thee, my Alan?"

"Silenced, but barely convinced. I recognize my exalted, noble-minded mother in every word, but still my heart cannot feel the necessity, cannot persuade itself there is any call for reparation. Rather let me seek my father; let me be the bearer of kindness and forgiveness from thee to him, and by my filial love soothe his departing hours. It is my duty as well as inclination to seek him in his exile, and prove to him I feel him still my father. Mother, there is no duty upon thee."

"There is duty, my child, the duty of *proving* forgiveness; it is easy to speak it, but less easy to give it action. Speak not of thy departure; it shall not be. Why shouldst thou leave thy gentle Isoline, resign the honorable post about the king thou bearest—for an indefinite period, a painful exile—when thy conduct has been such as to call down on thee all the happiness, all the blessings thou canst receive?"

"And will not this argument hold good with thee, my mother, yet more than with me? What hast thou not borne? What dost thou not merit? But if I may not go instead, let me go with thee; surely, in asking this, I do but claim the privilege of a son."

"Alan, dearest, thou hast risked more than enough for me hast hazarded thy happiness, all that could make life glad, to win my freedom, to bless me again with life and joy; thou hast heaped upon me such unutterable bliss in thy devoted

love, that in very truth I will draw upon it no more. I will see thee wedded to the noble being thou wouldst have resigned for me; to her, that were all the noble maidens of Scotland set before me, would have been my dearest choice. I will see this blessed rite, and then for a brief period separate myself from my beloved ones, to return to them when a sterner duty accomplished permits a life of unruffled tranquillity and joy. Seek not to dissuade me, my child; my mind is made up—and more, King Robert's tardy and reluctant consent obtained."

"Ha! ere thou wouldst confide in me, mother?"

"Son, I knew all that thou wouldst urge, nay, that perhaps thou wouldst seek the king to beseech his prohibition, and I forestalled thee. Do not look so grieved, my own Alan; what is this brief separation, painful to us both as it may be, compared to what we have both endured?"

"Separation! who talks of separation? Dearest lady, what is this all-engrossing subject, that blinds Sir Alan even to my presence? Truly, my lord, an thou heedest me so little, I will summon back all my former power to recall thine homage and obedience. What is this weighty matter, an the Countess Isabella forbids it not, I demand to know it, aye, every item, sir, on your allegiance?"

"And thou shalt know it, lady," replied Alan, gallantly entering at once into the spirit of her words, and bowing his knee before her; "and then, an thou dost not acquit me of all wilful negligence thou shalt condemn me to whatsoever penance that shall please thee," and seating her by the side of his mother, he resumed his cushion, and briefly, but eloquently, repeated all that had passed between his mother and himself.

"And must this be, dearest lady—will no persuasion turn thee from thy purpose?"

"None, love; for it is duty."

"And it is thy children's duty to go with thee. Alan shall not leave me, for when he and I are one, whither he goes I will go! Nay, not a word, sweet mother; for art thou not mine even as his? Thou knowest not Isoline, an thou thinkest even commands can turn her from a resolve as this. We will go together."

"Nay, dearest, but why shouldst thou leave the comforts, blessings that await thee in Scotland, to follow me for a doubtful good, encountering, perchance, much discomfort, even trial?"

"And better we encounter it than thee; but if truly thou wilt go, so, too, will we," answered Isoline, caressingly clinging to the countess; "and Alan can be spared from court, but not from his allegiance to thee and me."

Who could resist that playful mixture of authority and love? The countess tried alike entreaties and commands to change her resolve, but all in vain; and Lord Kircaldie, rejoiced beyond all control at the success of her eloquence, flung his arm round her waist, pressing more than one kiss upon her coral lips, and marvellous to say, eliciting no manner of reproof.

The consent of King Robert to this new arrangement was not so difficult to obtain as it had been to the countess's departure alone; he trusted that reconciliation effected, her children would prevail on the high-minded Isabella to return with them, and not, as she had resolved to do, remain till her husband should be released by death in voluntary exile.

The six months of mourning for the lamented Agnes had elapsed, and all was now active preparation for a double marriage; the Lady Isoline Campbell with the Lord Baron of Kircaldie, and Sir Walter Fitz-Alan, Lord High Steward of Scotland, with the youthful, arch, and lovely daughter of the Bruce. On a union which history claims, we need say but little; for Isoline and Alan the course of love had not run smooth, but for the Princess Marjory, ancestress of a long line of kings, and to her devoted cavalier it had, and now the last solemn rite was looked forward to with happiness as great to them as by those whose affection time and circumstance had more severely tried.

The evening previous to his marriage, as Lord Kircaldie was hurrying through one of the galleries of the palace of Scone, where the court was again assembled, and in whose ancient abbey the bridals were to take place, he was met by Lord Edward Bruce, joyous as usual.

"Good even, my gentle bridegroom; knowest thou I have been busy in thy service?"

"Your highness honors me. I pray thee accept my acknowledgments, though I know not wherefore."

"Busy I have been, but not successful, Alan, so keep thy acknowledgments. Rememberest thou the minstrel of whose songs I told thee? behold I have sent far and near for that mysterious being, whom I begin now to believe with the rustics

was spirited away from Stirling. He would have verily graced thy nuptials, and I am furious at the disappointment of my scheme. He is not to be found; reward, proclamation, all have been made and offered in vain. There, that mischievous smile again on thy lip; by my knightly faith, Alan, I verily believe thou knowest more about this mysterious marvel of minstrelsie than thou choosest to acknowledge."

"I know enough to pledge thee, my lord, that he shall be in the abbey church to-morrow, though I cannot promise in a minstrel's garb."

"How! is he only thus attired at will—how am I to know him, then?"

"By the golden brooch your highness so generously bestowed. Your lordship may believe my solemn assertion, that the treasured gift has never for one hour left his possession; and he who wears it, however marvellous may seem his transformation, rest assured is the minstrel's self. I have puzzled thee, my good lord; I pray you pardon the solution till to-morrow."

"I know not that I will, thou arch lover of mystery. Tarry; thou shalt explain this ere I let thee go. Isoline shall wait for thee."

"I cry thee mercy, good my lord," was the laughing reply; and the young nobleman extricated his robe from Prince Edward's grasp, and joyously departed.

A glowing scene of life and splendor, royalty and beauty, did the old abbey church of Scone present the following morning. It was nigh noon, and a winter sun played so brightly on the illumined panes, that they flung down innumerable shades of gorgeous coloring on the marble pavement as if vying with the splendid robes and glittering gems with which the olden shrine was peopled. The good King Robert, and his meek and gentle queen, from whose heart even the memories of the past had vanished before the gladsomeness of the present, surrounded by a host of Scotland's noblest peers and matrons, of names too numerous for mention, but including all whom, in their country's service, we have met so oft before, and all attired with a richness well suited to their rank and the ceremony they stood there to witness; and the group around the altar, how may the chronicler's dull pen do justice unto them? Both lovely brides were dear to Scotland, the one for herself

alone, for not a toil, a danger, a triumph was recalled in which the Lady Isoline had not borne a conspicuous part—softening the first, sharing the second, shedding new glory over the last, binding herself to every warrior and matron heart as part of Scotland; and the other, too, was dear, for they saw but the Bruce in his beauteous child. The princess, blushing and paling, smiling and tearful, alternately, gleamed like some lovely flower, drooping its head from the ardent gaze, seeking to hide the glory of its own soft beauty. The Lady Isoline, lofty, majestic as her wont, perchance a degree more pale, but permitting no emotion to vary her pure cheek—her mouth, her full dark eye, her glorious brow, all breathing a tale of soul, so thrillingly and forcibly, she needed neither tears nor smiles, and might be likened to a radiant star alone in the purple heavens, speaking of more than the beauty it reveals, and chaining our gaze as our hearts 'neath the voiceless magic of its charm, seeming lovelier and more lovely the longer that we gaze. And the respective bridegrooms might have been guessed, had they been placed other than they were. The young Fitz-Alan, flushed with high excitement, buoyancy and joyance so struggling for dominion that he could with difficulty effect control—eye, thought, heart, seeing, feeling naught but her thus soon to be his own, as one in a delicious dream, whose bliss was as yet too deep, too sparkling for reality. Not so Sir Alan—for we must still call him so; calm, collected, every feature breathing the deep, unshadowed fulness of bliss within, but bliss chastened, heightened by previous trial, he seemed well suited to take the vows of love, protection, faithfulness to that glorious one who knelt beside him, and whose eye, when it did not rest on him, so softly and sweetly acknowledged that for him even love of power was subdued, that she could bow her soul to his. But their thoughts, even in that solemn hour, were not alone on themselves; they thought on Him to whom that joy was owing, and deep, unutterable gratitude to him swelled either heart.

The Countess of Buchan, with the parents of Isoline, stood on the left side of the high altar; the king and queen on the right, where the Princess Marjory knelt. Fifty lovely maidens and as many high-born youths, scions of Scotland's nobles and knights, ranged alternately, the former bearing wreaths of myrtle and other exotic plants, formed an inner circle two deep

directly around the bridal group; the remainder of the choir and aisles crowded with the noble spectators. The aged Abbot of Scone, released from his weary captivity by exchange of prisoners, officiated at the altar, seconded by the monks of the abbey; the olden organ and its choir, concealed by a rich drapery of velvet and gold, rose behind them, and silence had fallen on that noble multitude, prefacing the burst of choral harmony with which the rites were to begin.

It was at that moment a hurried but military step was heard advancing up the nave and through the choir; it reached a vacant place between the Countess of Buchan and Prince Edward. Alan and Isoline looked up in inquiring wonder, little dreaming on what noble form their gaze would fall, for the kindly policy of the king had found some distant mission on which to employ the Douglas, till that eventful day had passed: yet there he stood, and there was no sign either of haste or negligence in his almost sumptuous apparel, naught which might betray the mental struggle which men gazed on him but to trace. He stood looking yet nobler, more gloriously majestic than e'en on the battle-field, when hundreds fled before his victorious brand, and Scotland hailed him patriot and deliverer. His eye was as bright, his lip as red as was their wont, and who, as they marked the glance of deep yet unimpassioned interest which rested on the bridal pair, might guess what had been the struggle of his soul?

The impressive service commenced, and not a sound was heard in that vast and crowded edifice, but the abbot's voice in all the eloquence of prayer. The responses of the princess were scarcely audible, but those of Isoline fell in thrilling richness on every ear and every heart.

Interested as was the countess in the solemn rites, her eye moved not from the face of him to whose exalted virtue her son owed his present bliss. There was no change, no shade in that face, whose deep repose might be likened unto marble; but as the words, "Those whom God hath joined, let no man put asunder," thrilled along the incensed air, the lip suddenly became compressed, the brow contracted, lasting but a brief moment; but as the lightning flash discloses the wreck its bolt hath made, so did that momentary change reveal the wreck of happiness within.

But there came no further change in mien or feature; even

when the voice of prayer had ceased, when naught but joyous gratulation sparkled round, when breaking from their thronging friends, e'en from the congratulations of the king, ere they sought the blessing and embrace of the Countess of Buchan, Isoline and Alan, with deep emotion, in brief but heartfelt words besought the Douglas to accept their gratitude, their love, and let them feel and reverence, and call him brother, from whom alone of earth their bliss had sprung.

"In your bliss I have made mine own," he cried; "let Douglas claim a brother's privilege, and be the first to give thee joy, to wish thee all of bliss that love and truth may give."

He held their united hands in his, pressed them kindly, and turned to greet the princess and her husband with such smiles and courteous jest as the hour might call.

"Art thou not the very king of mysteries, thou naughty rebel?" was the salutation of Prince Edward after warmly saluting his favorite niece. "How darest thou tell me he who wore my golden brooch was the minstrel I sought? Tell me, an thou wilt not dare my wrath e'en on thy wedding day, how camest thou to possess it? where is the prince of soft lays to whom I gave it?"

"So, please your highness, I can say no more than I have said. The prince of soft lays, as thou art pleased to call him, is before you, ready and willing to don the minstrel's garb wherever and whenever thou mayest command it."

"Thou that king of minstrels, Alan? this passes credence; why he had auburn locks soft and flowing as a maiden's, and a voice melodious and thrilling as, as—"

"That of my husband," archly answered Isoline; "try him, uncle mine, and trust me for the soft auburn locks so easily assumed, particularly as the face they shaded had been hid from all before."

"But wherefore, why so madly thrust himself on a pike's head, by tempting discovery in Stirling Castle? Verily, friend Alan, if they dub me a mad knight-errant, what art thou? what, in the name of all that's marvellous, took thee there?"

"His mother," interposed the countess, ere Alan could reply. "Your highness was informed the prisoner he sought lay within those beleaguered walls. How think you this discovery had been made?"

"Not by such madness, lady, trust me; truly I can scarce

credit it now. Don thy minstrel robe and viol, and I may believe thee."

"And so he shall, good brother, in a more fitting season," answered King Robert; "but for the present day he must fill a somewhat higher station. My lords and gentles, we crave your noble company in our royal halls. The church hath done her duty, now then let the palace."

* * * * * * *

Contrary winds and heavy storms had detained the Countess of Buchan some weeks longer than she desired in Scotland, but at length wind and time appeared more favorable, and the vessels prepared for her escort lay manned and ready along the coast of Fife, waiting her commands. Early in February those commands were given, and active preparations in the Castle of Fife announced her rapidly-approaching departure. The morning dawned heavily and stormily, but she heeded not the elements; her mind, fixed on a self-imposed duty, longed but to obey its dictates, and feel that between herself and her husband all was at length perfect reconciliation and peace. Nor had Isoline and her husband wavered in their determination; and now, surrounded by her retainers and by many other noble friends, who had assembled to attend her with all the honor, the respect she so well deserved, Isabella of Buchan stood upon the beach. The boat had been dispatched from the principal galley, it neared the shore, it stranded, and with a kindly gesture of farewell the countess, leaning on the arm of her son, placed her foot upon the plank. At that moment there was some movement increasing to confusion amongst the crowd; and Malcolm, springing to his master's side, besought him to wait one moment, as he had discerned a horseman riding such full speed towards them, that their detention for a brief while was evidently sought. Almost ere the words had passed his lips a very aged man had rushed through the crowd, had hurried down the beach, flinging himself at the feet of the countess, and grasping her robe as to detain her, ere breath returned for speech.

The words "Cornac," "my father," burst simultaneously from the lips of the countess and her son; and Isabella, bending kindly over him, bade him rise and rest, she would wait to speak with him till he could tell her all he needed.

"That I can now, most noble lady," he answered, rising and

standing before her. "My task is soon accomplished. I feared but that I had arrived too late, and thy pilgrimage of mercy had already commenced. Goest thou not to Norway?"

"Aye, to my husband; come ye from him?"

"Lady, yes; bearing that charity and reconciliation ye go to give. Remand thy vessels, lady, for them thou hast no need."

"Nay, my faithful follower, thy mission bears not on my purpose; wherefore should I not proceed?"

"Lady, he whom ye seek, the injurer and the penitent, thy noble, thy generous kindness can no longer avail; he hath gone where man may not reach him—where earth may not bless. John Comyn, Earl of Buchan, sinning but repentant, cruel but atoning, lies with the dead."

THE END

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